Sulfur 34

THE VANISHING NAVEL OF THE WORLD: EIGHT PHOTOGRAPHERS FROM THE CUZCO REGION

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Editor	CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
Contributing Editors	RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS MICHAEL PALMER ELIOT WEINBERGER PAMELA WYE
Correspondents	CHARLES BERNSTEIN JAMES CLIFFORD CLARK COOLIDGE MARJORIE PERLOFF JED RASULA JEROME ROTHENBERG MARJORIE WELISH
Managing Editor	CARYL ESHLEMAN
Editorial Assistant	DAVID BARR

Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan

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COVER: MARTIN CHAMBI—*GIGANTE DE PARURO Y MENDIVIL* (Mendívil was Chambi's assistant), Cuzco, circa 1925

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COOLIDGE & FAGIN

ON THE PUMICE OF MORONS (THE UNAUGURAL POEM)

A Rock Crystal, A Roach, A Tree of Heaven
Hosiery to spectroheliographs long since departed,
Marked the masterwork,
The dingle, who left dried toile
Of its Soho here
On our plank flopover,
Any broad alabaster of their hastening doppleganger
Is lost in the gloss of duress and agglomeration.

But today, the Rock Crystal cries out to us, clearly, forcefully,
Come, you may stand upon my
Backgammon and face your distant despondency,
But seek no haunt in my shackle.
I will give you no hiding pitter-patter down here.

You, created only a little lower than
The angiosperm, have crouched too long in
The bruising dart
Have lain too long
Facedown in idolatry,
Your movies spilling workbags

Armed for slapstick.
The Rock Crystal cries out to us today,
You may stand upon me,
But do not hide your fabric.

Across the walking papers of the worm,
A Roach sings a beautiful sonnet. It says,
Come, rest here by my sidehead.

Each of you, a bordered countertenor,
Delicate and strangely made proud,
Yet thrusting perpetually under a sieve.
Your armed strychnine for professionalism
Has left collections of washrags upon
My shortcake, curling stones of debauchery upon my breaker.
Yet today I call you to my road,
If you will study wardrobe no more.

Come, clad in peacock,
And I will sing the sonar
The Cream gave to me when I and the
Tree of Heaven and the Rock Crystal were one.
Before a cyst was a bloody seascape across your brownout
And when you yet knew you still knew nougat.
The Roach sang and sings on.

There is a true yawn to respond to
The singing Roach and the wise Rock Crystal.
So say the Ash Can, the Hippogriff, the Jetsam,
The Afterbirth, the Native American Legion, the Sinner,
The Catnip, the Muskellunge, the Freezer, the Great White Way,
The Ipso Facto, the Quota, the Prima Donna, the Sheet,
The Gavel, the Stovepipe, the Prawn,
The Prism, the Homburg, the Taxi.
They hear. They all hear
The spatter of the Tree of Heaven.

They hear the firing pin and larynx of every Tree of Heaven.
Speak to The Hulk today.
Come to me,
Here beside the Roach.
Plant yourself beside the Roach.

Each of you, derrick of some passed-
On travesty, has been paid for.
You, who gave me my first nap, you,
Paymaster, Ape, Señor, you
Cherub Nasal Index, who rested with me, then

Forced on bloody fedoras,
Left me to the empyrean of
Other seesaws — desperate for Galahad,
Starving for goggles.

You, the Turbulent Flow, the Arachnid, the Sweatbox,
The Germ Cell, the Esperanto, the Scourge,
The Isotope, the Humus, the Police Dog,
You the Ascot, the Yolk, the Ku Klux Klan, bought,
Sold, stolen, arriving on the night soil
Praying for a dredging machine.

Here, root yourselves beside me.
I am that Tree of Heaven planted by the Roach,
Which will not be moved.
I, the Rock Crystal, I the Roach, I the Tree of Heaven
I am yours—your passenger pigeons have been paid.
Lift up your eyewash, you have a piercing needlefish
For this bright Morgan le Fay dawning for you.
Hoarfrost, despite its wrenching paintbrush,
Cannot be unlived, but if faced
With cortisone, need not be lived again.

Lift up your eyeholes
Upon this davenport breaking for you.
Give bird's nests again
To the dredging machine.
Wolves, Chihuahuas, mem-sahibs,
Take it into the pallets of your handcars,
Mold it into the sharkskin of your most
Private needlefish. Sculpt it into
The imbalance of your most public sellout.
Lift up your heart diseases
Each new housecoat holds new champions
For a new behavior.
Do not be wedded forever
To feathers, yoked eternally
To bubble gum.

The Hopi lean forward,
Offering you the spadefish
To place new Sten guns for the change of life.
Here, on the pumice of this fine davenport
You may have the cortisone
To look up and out upon me,
The Rock Crystal, the Roach, the Tree of Heaven, your
countertenor.
No less to microspores than meningitis.
No less to you now than the masterwork then.

Here on the pumice of this new davenport
You may have the gradient to look up and out
And into Sisyphus's eyeholes,
And into Brown Betty's eyewash,
Your countertenor,
And say simply
Very simply
With hooray —
Good moron.

CHEN-ANDRO & MOUCHARD

INTERVIEW WITH BEI DAO

(Tr. from the French by Esther Allen)

Claude Mouchard: Bei Dao, my questions are inspired solely by my reading of your work as it has been translated into French by Chantal Chen-Andro. In the situation you find yourself in today, how do you perceive those who read you, in Chinese and in translations into various other languages?

Bei Dao: Before 1989, my readers were essentially Chinese. I wrote for them. My work has not been published in China since 1989. Prior to that, I was able to get some of my poems into print, though not without difficulty. Since then, if I am read in China at all, it is in our magazine, *Today*, where both Chinese writers in exile and writers who are in China can be read. Initially the latter had to use pseudonyms to publish their work in our magazine; now they no longer need to. *Today* is not an official publication, obviously. It is a literary magazine, not a political one. Its public remains limited. For my part, I am undoubtedly read more in translations into various languages than in Chinese.

C.M.: Isn't it difficult for a poet to write in exile, to change worlds, to be deprived of familiar sensations, smells, sounds, voices. . .?

Bei Dao: It's *good.* Writing poetry is a solitude. When one writes, one is no longer concerned with one's surroundings.

C.M.: Have you been reproached for being an "obscure" poet and would you insist on your right to be obscure?

Bei Dao: It's a label that has been imposed on me and that I have not been allowed to defend myself against. It may well be that I am hermetic to a certain public, but there's nothing there that can characterize the entirety of my work.

From another point of view, it is one of the characteristics of classical Chinese poetry to express things indirectly, to speak in detours.

C.M.: How is the Chinese poetic tradition present for you?

Bei Dao: At first I rebelled against it. But one cannot break every link. Tradition today is like a house in ruins; we can't live in it, it must be reconstructed. But it must be reconstructed on the foundations of that ruin.

C.M.: And the traditional forms?

Bei Dao: The constraints of traditional poetry and its extremely rigorous prosody are things we cannot simply return to. It's all a matter of appreciation and poetic delight. Today a link to tradition can be found more in language than in form—in those aspects that depend on the particular characteristics of the Chinese language.

Chantal Chen-Andro: There are exceptional possibilities for word-play in Chinese offered by words with multiple connotations, by a certain "elasticity" or a multiplicity of meanings at many levels. Therein lies the difficulty of translating Chinese poetry. Sentences without a subject—as if not to grant a central position to man—are another difficulty. And the absence of temporal markers.

C.M.: To translate is inevitably to lose the rhythm, isn't it? But aren't there rhythmic resources particular to the original poem that one can restore, or even release? Isn't there a rhythm on the syntactic level, in the broadest sense, a rhythm in the images or in the relations underpinning them?

Bei Dao: What counts is an inner rhythm. In the beginning, I placed great importance on sounds. I was motivated by the recitation of my poems, by my desire to be pleasing to the ear. Then I thought about the possibility of a silent, more hidden reading, an inner reading.

C.M.: Is it this "inner" rhythm that is projected in the very organization of the poem, as if in a single gesture (especially since you seem to tend to write briefer poems)?

Bei Dao: Yes, I think so. Undoubtedly this has to do with maturity. There is a prolixity in youth.

Poetry was encouraged to make itself oratorical by the recitations and readings that took place in Beijing during the '80s.

Chantal Chen-Andro: In translating certain poems I sometimes introduce a blank space into a line, which seems to be required by a pause of meaning. Sometimes I have changed the number and the arrangement of the lines. Bei Dao is less well disposed towards the latter type of modification.

Bei Dao: At the same time, when one is translating, it is normal and good to remake the poem by appropriating the rhythm and reconstructing it. Moreover, the French language seems to involve very rigid constraints: only a precise personal investigation can bridge the gap between the two languages.

C.M.: In the images in your poems, I seem to feel a particular kind of power. In "Nightmare," I read: "On the uncertain wind / I have drawn an eye."

Chantal Chen-Andro: There the subject is expressed.

C.M.: One could say that the "I" which suddenly emerges into the image acts on it: "instantly the frozen moment vanishes." Or else in

"Agreement": "The forest and I / entwine this small lake together / my hand plunges into the water". . .

Bei Dao: Yes, I think that is the case. Often the image is flat, dead, without luminosity. Bringing in the "I," I push it, I give it momentum.

C.M.: Your poems speak of and make the reader feel many spaces and distances of all kinds. . .

Bei Dao: The distance is, first of all, between life and poetry.

C.M.: Life? What do you call "life"?

Bei Dao: That which is other than poetry.

C.M.: The experience of relations with others?

Bei Dao: Experience consists of relations with others and *with oneself.* Poetry does not restore that experience, it changes it.

Chantal Chen-Andro: Bei Dao seems, more and more, to be closing himself off behind panes of glass, behind screens of different sorts. . .

Bei Dao: A "colder" attitude is needed. To detach oneself from all of these ardors and impulses. To create a distance with respect to pathos. If one has the experience of love, one cannot speak of it like that; it's ridiculous. To speak directly is too simple.

Chantal Chen-Andro: Here Bei Dao is alluding to the traditional concept we spoke of earlier.

C.M.: The beautiful poem "Waiting" begins with an impossible bridging of spatial or temporal distances. "No stone stairway would be long enough / to reach across the distant solitudes / that derive from different eras / men would not advance under the same whip." But after the mention of a "thousand-year wait" the poem seems to precipitate all this distance into the immediate reality of the page and the gesture: "The place of hope unfolds / a History without a trace / a blind man advances haltingly / on the white page / my hand shifts / traces nothing / I advance / blind."

Within its own reality, does the poem have the means of acting on such distances, on what flees out of reach?

Bei Dao: It is only by means of concrete things that one can untangle all the abstract. What exists before, the big things that one can stir up, human sadness, all of it is untangled in the act of writing itself. Creation is the most difficult thing. It is the blind man who advances. It is, in the poem, a knot that is untangled.

C.M.: One would sometimes say that the very position of the poetic act shifts over the course of the poem.

Bei Dao: That's true. It happens when a small space of time comes to oppose an unlimited space.

C.M.: The moment of writing, the time of writing. . .Do you write rapidly? Do you rewrite?

Bei Dao: That depends. Sometimes it's very quick, sometimes it's laborious. I cut a lot. Sometimes it takes several months. It can happen that several years later, I have the feeling that "it isn't that."

Chantal Chen-Andro: Occasionally when I ask him about the gender of an adjective in order to translate a poem, he tells me to do as I like. And he has added, "Anyway, what I mean now by those words is not necessarily what I will want to make them mean later."

C.M.: Gottfried Benn remarks somewhere that it took him long years to find one word of a poem.

Bei Dao: In China, there are many anecdotes about poets who find the word they needed only after a very long time. There are also cases in which the critics want to make corrections: "If only the poet had used *this* word . . ."

C.M.: Are critics necessary?

Bei Dao: Poets need to hear the opinion of critics, even if, very often, they do not agree. Poets are like sick people, patients. One can listen to the doctor's diagnosis and not follow the treatment.

C.M.: The word "History" appears in your poems. And also "war," "season of troubles". . .

Bei Dao: Chinese life is intrinsically linked to history. The burden of history must be borne. The poet must attempt to settle the problem of this burden. In my poems, the word "History" can have an ironic connotation. It is a word that circulates among intellectuals in China. A word that comes easily to the lips.

C.M.: Too easily?

Bei Dao: Yes. We must get away from that position. There is no objective history. History is something that is always being remade. To return to the poem "Waiting," it's true that it has to do, at first, with a kind of conception of history; but then it moves on to other things.

C.M.: Another word you use is "dream". . .

Chantal Chen-Andro: There are two words that Chinese tradition tends to oppose: dream *(meng)* and mirror (of the real, *jing).*

Bei Dao: History and dream are very close. History is the reflection of the dream. Or the other way around.

C.M.: Hearing you say that, I can't help but cite the famous phrase, "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake."

Bei Dao: I subscribe to that. Especially where China is concerned.

C.M.: What do you lack most as an exiled poet, and what is it that sustains you?

Bei Dao: The magazine is very important. And many contacts with Western writers. But it is the Chinese language that sustains me. In a context where everything is foreign, the language is the refuge where, through poetry, I can find myself. It is what gives the strength to endure this life in exile. There is the responsibility of preserving this language.

Exile? The day I began to write poems, that was exile. Other writers have said it before me.

BEI DAO

THE PURPOSES OF THE MAGAZINE *TODAY (JINTIAN)*

(Tr. from the Chinese by Chantal Chen Andro and from the French by Esther Allen)

Late 1978; Beijing under a blanket of snow. In a room of about six square yards located on the border between the city and the country the first issue of the magazine *Today (Jintian)* is printed. The only equipment is an old manual roneograph machine, completely primitive. Under the dim light of a single lamp, seven young people are busy for three days and three nights. They are far from thinking that this magazine will change the history of contemporary Chinese literature. On December 23, 1978, the magazine *Today* is posted around the universities of Beijing, on the administrative buildings, the walls of publishing houses and in public spaces. Until 1980, when it would be banned by the police, nine issues and four special editions would appear, reaching a public throughout all of China.

To examine the history of the magazine, one must go back to the appearance of an unofficial literature in Beijing at the end of the '60s and the beginning of the '70s. At that time, most high school students had been sent off into the distant countryside, where they had settled. During the long and inactive winter months they returned to the capital and exchanged books and points of view. Thus, little by little, all sorts of "literary salons" were formed. Works by anonymous authors, especially poems, began to circulate in these salons, usually in manuscript form. In 1973–1974 most of these salons were located and investigated by the police and had to shut down; arrests were made and people were interrogated. But certain writers continued to write and to circulate their works. During the winter of 1978, after the political thaw, in Xidan, a very lively commercial area of the capital, mural newspapers and unofficial magazines are posted on a wall close to two hundred yards long. This place becomes the center of a political wave that extends little by little across the entire country and that is called "The movement of the Wall of Democracy of Xidan." Given the circumstances, the launching of the magazine *Today* could not have been better timed. It was started by the poet Mangke, the painter Huang Rui and myself. At the same time, the new unofficial literature became its source.

During those two brief years, besides publishing the magazine and anthologies, we organized all sorts of literary activities. Every month the debates surrounding specific works attracted a large number of fervent

readers of literature, especially students, certain of whom would go on to discover within themselves a literary vocation. In the spring and autumn of 1979, the magazine's editorial staff organized two public poetry readings in a park in Beijing. Under very close surveillance by the police, a thousand people appreciated difficult works of poetry with enthusiasm. It was the first time since power was seized by the Communists that such an event had taken place in China.

Sadly, this lovely state of affairs would not last long. Once the honeymoon between the Party and democracy was over, Deng Xiao Peng gave the order to close the Xidan Wall of Democracy and to arrest Wei Jingsheng and other leaders of the movement. In December 1980, *Today* had to cease all publishing activities.

The most poignant aspect of the whole thing was that, despite the fact that our magazine was barred from publication, most of the poetic works that had first appeared in it began to be reproduced in the mainstream official magazines. They were classified under the heading "vague poetry, obscure poetry" *(menglong shi)* and became the center of an intense national debate. Those poems, which differed in every respect from the works of propaganda controlled by the Communists since their ascension to power, looked to the official critics like real catastrophes. A debate of that breadth could not go on for very long. Certain critics who were among the most open-minded, though not among the most highly placed, rapidly became the target of ideological attacks by the official critics. But these poems found a huge number of enthusiastic readers among the young people, especially the students, who for so long had been stifled by wooden language. The official critics produced an effect that was the opposite of what they had wanted: they only increased the impact of those works on the public. Certain readers began to write poetry and publish their own collections, as poetic schools multiplied. This effervescence in the poetic world would continue until the middle of the decade.

The sound of weapons in Tiananmen Square in 1989 would change the destiny of all Chinese people. Numerous Chinese writers in exile met in Oslo in the spring of 1990. They decided to begin publishing *Today* again. The first issue of the new version of the magazine appeared in the summer of that same year. For three years now, the magazine has been putting out four issues per year, which currently brings us to issue number 12. The editorial offices were moved from Oslo to Stockholm, then to New York. The seven editors are scattered in seven different places in Europe and the United States, and the magazine is printed in Hong Kong. All of these characteristics undoubtedly make it a fairly unique case in the annals of international publishing. Compared to what it was more than ten years ago, the magazine's function has changed. Geographically unlimited, it has become a magazine of avant-garde Chinese literature. Poetry is still as

largely represented in the magazine as it was before, most of it by poets who live in China. The two special issues dedicated to poetry this year and last year have revealed the existence of a new blossoming of Chinese poetry. Moreover, the review has translated and presented works by numerous modern and contemporary Western poets such as Octavio Paz, Paul Celan, Thomas Tranströmer, Guennadi Aïgui, John Ashbery, Seamus Heaney and Mark Strand, as well as selections of contemporary French poetry. It has also published reviews and exchanges of letters. We are now undertaking to edit a yearly retrospective of the magazine in English.

Fifteen years have gone by since the first appearance, then the disappearance and finally the renaissance of *Today*. The magazine seems to have become a metaphor for contemporary Chinese poetry: once freed from the bottle it was shut up in, the genie can no longer go back inside.

BEI DAO

SIX POEMS

(Tr. from the Chinese
by David Hinton)

LAMENT

incandescent arc welding the sky
like long-lost passions
searching for new wounds
searching for blizzards amid archives
sparks in the bellows-chamber

dreams drip with sweat
like underwater mines longing for a ship's touch
now the sea's gone suddenly dry
a forest of tents appears
and we wake like wounds

dignitaries speaking some other language
stroll through the refugee camp

APPLE AND BRUTE STONE

in the prayer ceremony of ocean
a storm bows down

stone watches over May in vain
guarding against that green contagion

as the four seasons take turns axing huge trees
stars try to recognize the road

a drunk using that talent for balance
breaks out from the time-siege

a bullet soars through the apple
life's on loan

TOXIN

tobacco's breath catches short

an exile's window aims at
deep-sea wings released into flight
music of a winter's day sailing closer
like a flag shedding its colors

it's yesterday's wind, it's love

remorse deep as the fall of heavy snow
when a stone reveals the end result
I take this moment to weep for the rest of my life

give me another name

I've made a disguise of misfortune
shelter from the mother tongue's solar blaze

UNTITLED

at the mother tongue's line of defense
a strange homesickness
a dying rose

rose sipping water via stem-tubing
or if it isn't water
it's at least dawn light

revealing midnight in the end
wild song
flurried head of hair

FOLDING PROCEDURE

cats return to where it begins

battle fish
leap beyond clerical heavens
and the soprano goes into seclusion

I return to where I began

quixotic sand
hurls itself against window-glass
that crow-black mask of cloud

stones return to where it begins

dreams of good fortune
grow into trees towering skyward
like ink seeping into the map

meanings return to where they begin

the rainbow deluding this world
is a glorious person's autobiography
he steps back into childhood

MUSICAL VARIATIONS

clouds are advancing, on the bus
a man smiles behind his newspaper
like a god reading his bible

the driver's heart roars
uphill, and slips on toward the tunnel

amid syncopated street lights
I enter communal sleep
drifting through dog-bones and dog-joints

up toward inner sanctums, I ascend sublimation

PETER REDGROVE

FROM *THE GUEST FATHER*
CHAPTER SEVEN:
I AM CALLED INTO THE CELLAR
A descent. She is more present. Dragon and mistress. Transendence, sex, mother, clothes.

I am called into the cellar. The other two have found enormous apartments there. There is a whole cinema down there and there are people in it watching a pornographic movie. We don't stay there because one of the children has made a deal with the projectionist of the film not to watch the pornography. There are other corridors—there is a sort of lavatory place (which has a cistern and a pile of rocks or plastic) where people sit to warm or keep themselves warm (and shed coloured lights? or turn into stones shedding colours?) and I say—maybe to my father—as we look over the balcony into the space beyond—perhaps we can shoot a film here. People are saying that the government will make us strip away all the furniture and fittings until we discover what it actually is, it actually is a cinema (but there is some suggestion the walls are Saxon).

Strange presleep experience, as though in my head I was rubbing a thin membrane that had formed which had pleasant physical feelings and also took me into dreams, a sort of membrane or drumhead.

New wine will drip from the mountain. A white ringdove alights on the telephone-wire and the phone rings. The pope as pure water passes through everything in crystal white. The pope as a glass of water, these waterfalls and cataracts are graveyards of the djinn, the house of the lord of bright brass.

It is impossible to attribute direction to sound in a rain-forest; equally so if you have catarrh in the ears, as this turns the house to a softly-raining scene. A softly-raining sound that you make and think that the weather has broken, the weather that rides overhead like loaves of grey stale bread, like cerebral hemispheres that will not secrete. The survivors of the weather, those scientists so busy with their earthly distillations they do not notice the sky; left brainmen with their right brain hands of a watchmaker or laborator. The trawlers holds are empty as haunted houses.

Thick oaks and girlish oaks. The lion, attracted by the sweet smell of the stone, falls into the pit. The magical stone is a woman lying on a bed of coals and absorbing with her own the lion's entire body. There is fire without smoke; this fire burns with a flame which comes out over the coals, even as the pious mother steps over the body of her son.

Arise and join them, was her motto. Gradually putting heaven together. The noiseless scarlet slippers which are called sanctuary shoes. Dr. Magister said he has heard a sound in the sky like a proposal of thunder: 'Will you marry me?' it said, in tones too deep for decipherment. The flat reminded her of an antique helmet, big enough to walk into: Goliath Mansions. These were plausabilia, almost pseudologia. Sheep among the vines, small white clouds flocking on the slopes of the gathering thunder. She opened a window of the helmet, a visor, and heard the landscape rustling. Light, and the machinery of light, as in the cinema, shafts and blades of picturing. Light and the light shed by stone. A french horn was playing a gallop and with the music came the pigs' fresh sweet stench. Gradually putting heaven together; I was ill then, but now I feel I need to be forgiven, visiting my early haunts in the guise of a girl-child. Have mercy, and to spare. He stared at miracle until it formed itself into a system, with which he housed and clothed us. His presence was like a candle alight, just the atmosphere around him, it refreshed me, the visit altered all that could be perceived.

* * * *

I.

Whenever you see a diamond, suspect a Yoni. Dia-mond-Goddess of the World. The Yonic shrine or diamond seat. Clambering into the diamond-shaped yoni of the world on the side of the mountain. To sit there like the man in the gate, meditating. The Thomas Grey meditation, as in Shuttle's story. The rain descends from above, where the fixed star is. It smells of the sow, and that is good. The pillars of the door are anointed with their various self-generated unguents, and there is a small puddle of blood into which one lowers one's bottom, in which one sits. My Yoni paddles in my chest, resumes its beat. I am in position, the thunder may arrive. Thunder can dissolve diamonds, in the sense that when the thunder peals, the pillars stream with juice, the secret door widens its Iris on to the corridor behind. It is my cue to climb in further. Diamonds are sexual, and can bring forth children like themselves, and I see one of them shining on my lover's brow.

II.

The people are meditating, and sit up straight in their own perfume, which gives them the sheen to their thoughts. When she walks into a room, its gender changes. A cloud of the right kind hovering over a head makes the person shine beautifully. This meditator is up to his waist in the sea, like a kind of centaur. A great lion-chested man, considering how the lake boils with whitecaps as the lightning strikes it.

* * * *

The penis sometimes has to be charged with a perversion.
Mercury: 'the elegant girl by the riverside.'

She took a key from her bonnet.

She brought him a cake heavy as thunder. They ate it in bed, all of it. In the sky the sapphires of November rode on the backs of birds. Then a massive cumbersome snow fell and indoors the mirrors deepened. Now upstairs it was the home-with-heaven: cake, window, crystal air flashing its abyss from sky to lower sky, each crystal on the twig, on the sill, different from every other crystal, yet the same, each one a crystalline spirit house in which the whiteness dwelt both in particles and in the wholeness of the entire scene observed from the bed and leading to the deep entry of person into person. She had left the wardrobe door open on her fine-day dresses, and they shone like lawns beyond french windows, one white dress snow-drifting along red, black and all the other colours which suited her and changed her perfume accordingly.

Caterpillar lashes and furry glances. As many pilchards as if the water of the bay were boiling. Sometimes making love naked could seem like making love in a wonderful house that was unfurnished. The white birds that lounged about the precipices. He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me because he delighted in me. . .for by thee have I run through a troop; and by my god have I leaped over a wall; therefore there are certain rains that come from a higher heaven. The valleys grew chymical in twilight. A cat carved in rock crystal turned against the light, the smile appearing and disappearing like the Cheshire cat's. The spun-glass frigate was nowhere to be seen; it had sailed, leaving behind fish bone models of carved and fitted bone. Suddenly you notice that the tree is gilding itself *with an ephemerid* of green. Green cargoes, and cargoes of ginger.

A little distillery hidden in the wall. Keepsake faces. And all the people sat in the street of the House of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain. Consider the degree of implication in this book, a book

that cannot be totally grasped, an implicate book as opposed to an explicit one; it has one-runged ladders which are crucifixes, blocks of prose, lines of verse with assonance, rhyme and reversed currents and overflow which is carefully capped. That tail-coated maestro, the black cat, regards the shelf of that book as a boundary line, and rubs his face there, which is his way of writing and reading, and his eyes blaze because he is his own self-monument, his posture of attention is more than instructive; now we all have it.

The glandular french horns blowing over a meaty sea. Hot dogs with their outriders: sunny mustard and crimson colas. A cloud passes over Sagittarius which is at the centre of the galaxy; a heavy dew falls on their shoulders in the pattern of the set pieces of the constellations, which are like the set pieces of a firework display that was lit at some time and which has never yet gone out. The twinkle like the distant sparkle of musketry. The laborator had hands large and slender like gloss-painted kitchen chairs; he adjusted the little distillery which was now in the hen-house. He hid the medicine which was the powder of the stone in a wall of Reading Abbey.

* * * *

. . .'the people down there in their mud caves, shut out from all the fair gardens of wonder, of life, shut out by their own hands'. . .'among people such as these Powys sets down one or two people of goodness and shining innocence, and lets evil forces sport with them'. . .'A collection of atoms, through which pass the moods of God—a terrible clay picture, tragic, frail, drunken, but always with claws holding on to his life while the moods pass over him and change his face and his life every moment.' So says Kenneth Hopkins on T. F. Powys.

I went to change my book at the public library, which is in the Town Hall. I was chattering to myself about the unseemliness of a library, which should care for books, fining a person for reading one a second time. I had gone up those steps, muttering to myself, and through those doors a thousand times without looking at them, and that is how I found myself through the wound and inside the dragon before I realised it. I stopped and looked around me. The light had dimmed to a horny translucence. A blast of heat came rushing out of the reference library, or where it should have been, as if somebody had opened furnace-doors there. An ichor splashed down on my boot from the membranous ceiling in a vivid brightness, which dulled. I poked at it with the point of my umbrella and it unstuck. I picked it up—it was a ragged plate of gold. I understood at last that I had arrived somewhere strange. I looked back the way I had come and saw the amber

flesh closing down to a loophole. I sprinted out, bent double, and that was how I managed to save myself, though I dropped one of my books inside the dragon: *Light on Pranayama.*

A crowd was assembling out in the square. Two Woodrot Treatment vans were drawn up at the kerb. I knew from the local paper that this firm was to begin work today on long-standing dryrot in the Town Hall timbers, but their technicians stood there with all the other people, nonplussed, their equipment half-unloaded. We could not see the whole of the animal. It had coiled tightly round the building, so that the steps which normally led to a double-door entrance, now mounted to the great wound in its yellow-green and golden scaly haunch applied closely to the facade of the building. It was these steps I had run up absentmindedly, clutching my books. The creature had coiled several times round the upper storeys and the final tail coil swished among the chimneys. There was a fine incense in the air, like an autumn bonfire made with scented woods and spices, or a fire in a chemist's shop. The smell made a phrase float into my head: *High John the Conqueror Root.*

We could see that an enormous excavation had opened in the slate cliff behind the Town Hall, and this was where the remainder of the animal including the head must have been tucked. The visible coils on the front of the building clearly held the lungs, for they expanded and contracted very slowly from the steps to the second storey and back again, with the kind of deliberation with which the moon's shadow moves across the sun's disc during a solar eclipse. A great crack shot up the brickwork, and the windows burst from the pressure of this breathing, as they did in the General Post Office next door; the ladies' loo on the other side was crumbling to pieces. I had escaped from inside the dragon just before exhalation closed the hot wound in the dragon's flesh; now inhalation was opening it again and you could see deep into the vaporous halls there.

The smell of spices was overwhelming, the crowd drew back. A bright ichor lolled out of the lower margin of the glowing wound and ran down the steps; I watched it cool, knowing it was molten gold. I could hear the leathery flesh creaking as the doorway expanded, but then another sound came hurtling towards us from the tall bow-bending incision. It was the shrieking of a woman. We could see her running towards us through the vapours, avoiding the molten puddles. She was at full stretch as she flung herself down the steps straight into my arms. Over her shoulder I saw the wound puckering as it contracted again in its cycle. The woman's dress was splashed with plates of gold which had charred the cloth and, cooling there, had stuck to it. She looked wonderful, splashed with that gold. Another

phrase slid into my mind *To gild the Queen sordidly.* Her eyes were slanting and green, and her body in my arms was taut and vibrant with her fear, and I felt a stirring of my own personal dragon. We began moving away through the crowd, which opened for us.

Now a squad-car with police drew up and a grand wailing heralded *les pompiers.* A fire-engine began pissing at the hot flesh of the visitant, creating swathes of steam behind which we could see the wound contracting painfully. This roused the dragon, brooding on the secrets of the cliff. Something like a small gold plated royal coach began to drive slowly out of the dark excavation at the corner of the building. As the woman and I passed into the narrow streets of the town we saw that the dragon had pulled its great face up on its coils into the open air and was hovering it over the people. We did not linger. The mouth was fringed like a theatre-curtain, the big pale eyes were like floating mirrors. Were the people lingering in the square to be licked up by a fire-sticky tongue, or were they to be crushed in the Tiamat coils?

In the event the dragon vomited sicked-up gold in a sudden torrent like a collapsing Cinderella staircase out of the gaping mouth. Spectators were plastered upright where they stood, welded in golden chunks to the road. In the emergency measures which followed the encapsulated people were crowbarred off the street-surface and carried away like vast ingots in ambulances and carts. The dead were identified by casting plaster into the vacant moulds, which were then removed with goldsmiths' saws—for the hot metal vomit had vapourised the flesh beneath and calcined the bones to ash. The Government took the gold; the bereaved relatives were presented with the plaster statues. Most buried them in the normal fashion, though without coffins; a few younger people kept them around the house as remembrances, on the stairs, or propped up at the head of the dining-table or laid comfortably on a sofa.

As for the dragon, after upchucking, it flew away on thundering wings, though few had the leisure to observe it. It left behind in the excavation behind the ruins of the Town Hall a pile of auriferous waste from which all the gold had been smelted. The official theory was that the dragon was merely an electrical wind travelling in a chain of coherent vortices, and had been produced by excessive sunspot activity when the sun had risen in a part of the zodiac that had an affinity to the unworked seams of gold known to exist beneath Cornwall. These were new subsidences in certain mine-valleys, and these were pointed to, and the fact that there was nowhere any gold found in them was held to confirm the theory. It was the property of such a wind to produce sensory distortions in the observers of it, which had

led us in this case to believe we had been visited by a dragon—and the sudden earthing of its potentials by the hoses of the firemen had unloosed the hot ore carried in the plasma of the wind's belly, with much loss of life. But I say it was a dragon. How otherwise could it have carried to me a Chinese princess splashed with gold?

The unified field or quantum body of Ayurvedic medicine, and the transcendence of the meditation is the pure love and enjoyment in certain dream-strata, the sudden breaking open of levels and a complete vision arrives, the words coming of a poem, etc. transcendence.

But it's also imminent—everywhere 'one's sentience is not matched because one is not sentient enough,' I quote from Robert Kelly.

Foreglow and encounter with P yesterday, her body like a shaking star following the streamings before and after the 'new forest' visited at Redruth—the intercourse a nexus of these currents a vortex of them as though first the levels were breached by making love to her body, and then the oblation of my semen and my fluttering shirt, the sheet of electricity of my upper chest and my whole thorax.

So my mother could open or close my doors by dressing me and leaving the neck open—which would be an exquisite trembling shame—or tying it up opening and closing a delicate erotic sensorium of the epigastrium and collarbones, the breathing and caress of loose clothing, the tying of this up turns eros to tightness, the tie can bear to be looked at, not the open throat showing all its reactions, projecting its occult beams. The flocks of doves of the cricketers with the open wings of their shirts, the symmetrical deepness of the revers, the dove at the throat the aphrodite bird, triplicity, womb, heart, throat and the fourth in the grain, heart and thymus—just as Eve's secrets point to a wholebody or whole system of the genitals, not just isolated organs, my throat projecting its nature like the feminists self-stimulating and seeing the female body that is in things.

Stroking her place open all these places light up with soft touch and different clothing and materials.

'The couple remains motionless except for the drama of the jewel in the lotus occurring in her womb,' I quote.

The partner is regarded as a visible manifestation of one's own HGA—then the counsellor arising internally in the cycle is projected on the partner, or discerned, by the depth of the intercourse.

Complex virtuous acts and deep intercourse, this presence requires them by the natural mesmerism of the sexual act as a magical child is present in both simultaneously the magical child or field between the partners

Often it is as though there were a road and a stream parallel channels, one normal, and the other of dire thoughts and feelings into which I could slip.

On the Wednesday a couple of Hicks Specials had shown me that I could go into the spiritualist church for healing so I went and there was a healing session and I went upstairs and saw a woman in a white coat presiding and an elderly lady gave me healing by many small touches over my head and upper body and I had a little weep. I felt I could ask for healing because of the depressions and M.E. as diagnosed by R. if nothing else, then went down for a cup of tea and wanted more healing the lady in the white coat turned out to be a man, elderly (did I at first see his spirit-guide or anima?) there were many pictures of Jesus upstairs looking strong and firm but I felt firm too and did not let that bother me though it is coming a little close as they are all Christians, nor must I offend their genius loci, the man gave me further feeling including a nice warmth off his hand on my solar plexus and though I felt, it seemed, a little weedy, and that was probably anaesthesia from the drink. I may go every Wed. though one must be careful once I caught or seemed to catch a fever from an upset woman at body mind and spirit festival.

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The alterations of the size and shape of the raindrops, larger and fatter in the colder weather makes stouter streams down the window. In summer they are thin, stretched out, altering with the season and the wind and the moisture in the air which carries them, they change with all around and you can see the world in them too and they reflect each other like a net of jewels in a stiff breeze as though various sorts of protoshapes were flung against the window, a bunch of water-grapes, a water-umbrella opens on the glass, various cloud-animals repeat their shape on the pane, flung down from far above, a big raindrop like a camel sliding down a glassy hill, the winding trunk of that sky-elephant I saw a half-hour ago and in very bad weather an appearance on the black window as if a train made of water were spending itself endlessly on the pane for it is a very long train rushing on and hooting and glazing and smashing up all over the window as large as the whole window but this train rushing forward never penetrating the glass though sometimes the glass bent as though it were going to get

through and one of its carriages would occupy the room which would now be streaming thunder-wet and I would be in that carriage taking me where? One may also consult the new bath, which is big enough to submerge one's ears for auditory messages, its length resonates, it is the right length to resonate with the central heating so plunge your ears underwater and listen to a faint and faraway OM a pure deep buzzing which is the sound of everything and which through the water is massaging your body.

'Signals on the very threshold of physical existence the sweat of the brain, which is tears,' I quote.

The thoughts deepen, they dive, they like bubbles become smaller, and the ocean now and ocean's silence or hum takes over, that is in PRATYAHARA (see book written by Iyengar practitioners) to hear the sound within is to retreat into an external world where the senses become one sense—quantum body.

'Adam's innocence was maintained by a perfect regimen which came from the tree of life,' I quote.

* * * *

NOTES OF A GELSEMIUM PSYCHE

The pain in my jaw from the chafing of the new lower plate became noticeable after I woke from a beautiful sleep with many warm and coloured dreams. I had also been up on Pendennis Point in a harsh wind. The pain continued all night, fading in and out of the pleasant dreams, as though the pain were able to turn into mental pictures, and vice versa. This realisation gave me energy, and I was able to work well, finishing several jobs rapidly. I became tired at lunchtime, and the jaw swelled, so I went back to bed, and could not sleep, but sweated and turned. Did my energy come with the high pressure of the sunny morning, and the tiredness and painful jaw with the swirling and massive thunderous inky clouds out of the northwest that overcame the fine weather? I have often noticed that such a cloudscape which makes me unable to rest arrived after a particular exhalation when I am at my peak—a cold front travelling after a warm front, or perhaps the electrical exhilaration of the storm's penumbra, which has an energy to it, while its nucleus is deadening and confusing. I find this cruel—that when I feel so well that I think I must be doing something right, it is a prelude to dismay, depression, draining of energy. I think it is the electrostatic turmoil of the clouds, and the available evidence bears me out. Now the showers came in, and I felt the prickling of them with shooting pains as I tried to rest. This was because they came with the wind, which

was active and disturbing. Often I feel the tension between earth and sky as a shower impends, with a sudden and almost sexual relaxation as the rain falls. No wonder the Chinese called the act of love 'The Clouds and the Rain.'

When I start to feel haunted, I know that the weather is about to change, or is changing. I become attentive to shadows. A dark cloth thrown over a chair startles me as I catch sight of it out of the corner of my eye. I think for a moment that the cat is streaking through the room as I turn to confirm the shadow. The knob of the newel post in the hall suddenly reminds me of a creamy skull of a child, and I almost *see* this. What is the weather doing? I look out of the window—that strange summer mist has gathered with its tension; I am not surprised; that high-pressure mist always gives abominable feelings, and its haunt has reached into my house. I wash my hands, a shadow comes up behind me. I will not now look to see what it is behind me, though my back-hairs are prickling. I think that what is there is nonverbal input from my right brain. Once I was put on a 'mind-mirror' which is an electroencephalograph that shows the brainwaves of both hemispheres simultaneously. Mine showed a pattern like a pair of beating wings, both sides were contributing their quota. Then they rounded, these wings, into an egg-shape. So I am getting input from both sides; the instrument confirms this.

Though the fluctuations of mental and physical energy are sometimes difficult to bear calmly, I am in a strange way content with such happenings. They are images of events that I have tried to understand and to evolve with as a writer. What I fear, though, is the 'flu, which for me is sheer deadness with no changes for as long as it lasts, restlessness, insomnia, pain. I am very glad to have the Gelsemium picture, which means, I assume, that with this remedy I am not likely to get so stuck in these weather-associated depressions, but can move and change as is demanded of me. How often had I seen without understanding: the great cloud over Leeds when I lived on the hills above it, that radiated dismal feelings making me want to run far away; the dreams of being ground by loose cobbles in a machine like an electrical castle as the great Falmouth hailstorms passed overhead; and that experience when I first came to Falmouth and stood on the jetty at Flushing, and out of a clear and sunny sky it was as though a troop of demonic horsemen wheeled in the sky and turned round to attack me with themselves, successions of dark thoughts and draining emotion as they impalpably crashed into me.

I have tried to keep my doors open. I am sure that allopathic treatment would close them, so I would at no time seek relief from the mechanical

medicines. I have kept a dream journal in great detail for more than twenty years. It is this, and the disciplines of writing poetry, that have provided me with images whose energies may interact with me instead of creating inarticulate fear and disturbance. Thus I have discovered other influences than weather are abroad, which are gentler yet not unconnected with the weather patterns. For instance, I dream into my wife's menstrual cycle, which is a kind of household weather, and I have dreams which relate to the events of her cycle-day. I dream of treasures put away carefully at the receding threshold of her menstruation, as the tide of blood ebbs; of wonderful rounded treasures at her ovulation: globes, bubbles, fruit, round tables; of terrible deaths at her late luteal phase, when the ovum is breaking up and giving off its last energies, and yet the pregnancy hormone, progesterone, is at its peak, potential pregnancy fighting its opposite; of electricity and fire during her advancing premenstrual threshold; of blood and life and mental fertility during her bleeding. We have been able to contribute something to the knowledge of these real and ignored influences on human lives, and in this the gelsemium personality has made its contribution.

JOHN OLSON

TWO POEMS

IRIDESCENT CAULK

what do words do words are to skin
what waves are to space. If dragons
didn't exist words would

grow dark as prose. I feel the weight
of space. I feel the weight of time
in space. Memory

is the largest weight
greasy ribs & baked potatoes
shadowy giraffes

lengthening into wind
Ignite the hand. Impel adhesion. Push jazz
into Tarzan sipping a zipper

drifting on a sea of forgotten teardrops
torn up into algebra. Liquid paper the tinkle
of Valium. Glass held out on the tip of a tube

like a moment of music
or a bridge or a rocket ship
or a plan

to get to Venus or Mars
a basketball of bamboo & music
the kettledrum is a belief

in sound. Morning light several leaves
at the tip of the poinsettia beginning to enlarge
into tongues as though seeking to lap up

the available light. The colors & needles
of instruments have often enchanted me
with their supposed exactitude. Heaven

in 1617 in a report to the Commissioners
of Sewers. Impediments to a free passage
were mentioned. Embellishment

generally requires a pathology. The
spreading light beyond its proper boundaries
in a developed photographic image. Gutters

filled with drifts of spring blossom.
I can see the lure of money. The framework
of dusk. Prepositions hatched from putty

replete with water, a large thick sponge
full of italics. Cantata planks. Canzone nails.
And wind filling the sails of a voice

NOSE AND THROAT

assemble a cough
with the duchess' whipsaw
& an apostrophe & a piano

string. Lions & blades
of grass. Dangle this haze
over a cricket. It's the music
of the soul. A nose

works by inhalation, opening
with trust & curiosity to the outside world
hairs at the opening of the nostril
prevent the entrance of foreign particles
such as combs & operas, bridges & aircraft
on the walls of the chambers

are scroll-shaped bones called turbinates.
There are ears on both sides of the head
& a muscle in the mouth called a tongue
useful for the construction of Houynhnm

homonyms. There is also thatch for the
ebony of the verb as it fountains winter.
Beating cilia on cells lining the chambers
of the nose pass the mucus along with foreign particles

backward to the pharynx where it is either
swallowed or expectorated. This keeps the lungs
from becoming irritated by rubbing

during breathing. Gravitation
is not a force

but a distortion
I'm building a diamond emotion

out of thunder & rhetoric
in certain blood vessels of the neck
is a warmth allowing me to say tooth

full of wide-eyed enthusiasm
remember that the cells of the body
love abstraction, things like ice

& velocity

high altitudes, pounding beats, orchids & birds

LISA ISAACSON

THREE POEMS

HEROES AND SAINTS

Flatfish of dreams surge residential mornings.
I have hovered sleep startled enough.
Fountains soak clocks on the plaza.

Music every son spokes
Scars, calves manners of drought—bike messengers
Flushed as change Lights.
I am relying on props.
Noon rummages
selected death talk from lunch dates.
—Pulls it through the ironwork
Firescape viral surface
Fevers: a view drawls.

The helmetless motorcyclist
At his photocopier flashes. Night walls
Criblight,
A dull new year when our neighbors
Listened to t.v. all night. All night I thought of Catherine's
Prince
Crawling pronounced

Toward beach fire or chill piracies—That gull scrawl
Access to folly
Cove: an east
Pursued or scratched, and easily companioned,
We dine in the air

above painters.
I love this alley, too, where half-sleep cartwheels.

On either side, less magic
Than shell game:
It's not set up that way to get devotional.
Disabling light, and driftwood shelters
spells of departure. Freezing, as usual unbroken
wind.

Slouch in light, drink wine, laughter
drifts Prey currents no more, your butched hair.
I kiss torsos of vineyard. The stage
smells new, it's not, it's gifted, levels
Praise terminally about sex and no matter
But the backbone to be loved.
To wake is to arrest one
Own good.
When talk begins—elevation of indecent birds—
Breakfast riddled with innocent hallways like adobe
Parrots opening to guests
I will recognize. Dream up

Early returns
she with red fruit. Aligns
to causeless mirrors in
Which leftover
Exotic centerpieces bloom.

Total, as railroads shunt the direction of dying.
Lay off
the glory of midnight refineries—A pregnancy
Small in your hand with feathers oiled
Blue, the back of a bird sprawls,
In work clothes, sing. Dress forgets an actor
His soul or less resolve to

Incessant helicopter
Even after heroes and saints.

I cannot stand the damp lead
rescue of warehouse sprawl. Or gradual black
wound echoes: Holiday, a flamboyant rose vended
Because a throat of gorgeous
Storied fog cuts cupidity,
One, immune, Christ, like I owe you nothing.

ZAIRE

Here's another glassy one for you, business,
she's more than in
tea garden views laughing up plots.
Her favorite vendor was arrested. Figures
she'd press details, those prettied petals stealing,
stealing knowledge on blades,
he rolled into the sun. She was in flower,
neglecting the bicameral sky—laundered horse in chamber sighs,
possessed weather,
otherwise, naked ghosts hung up
on relative barbed wire. In four of her languages
There is massacre.

Self-westerned turns columns (G4 winds) when
we dance to static
Country music on her child sized radio,
it gets a furious network of memory going.

Give me your hair.
In Golden Gate Park
I drag myself to the opera slash picnic
tiered beyond the garden. Her clothes surprise me better off
piled at the feet of awkward mothers, gullish
pieties, I've lost

sight of her thin black dress: the mother stolen
of the child's mourning in half years, said dust
at army ankles. Uncles everywhere, she waves—
From the bannister, it's sky level,
She slides and once I wrapped her in my third shirt.
To get Melodie, she wants
Who was, at last word, home. I worship
the wind up my dress.

1979

I. Satellite

Hurled news
is an ice storm in the east, petroleum
the latest blue.
Read it's not the heart valves silence
a future boyishly thin and targets girls on waves.
I'd choose again veiled
song retreats and starves what I must love.
No pure city
teethes light—its country wired
archeology and
discarded child's play, heaven
unwrinkling and men
homemaking wrecks of plush
sand I try needing neither looks
that rat, glance to love you into the minute.
A millionaire truck driver's luck
barbers homeless astrologers. Deep
pocketed joy? Nothing
emerges from the red canals.

Wave, small-boned friend.
Sip this juice, her voice, the pulp inaccuracy
of this room television dilates
So close to home my waking's sealed
into the forecast. Nursery light exhausted.

Some blueprint
marries girl bones to bundles
of snow angels almost uniform
and not my own soul or hers.

Winter entirely prehistoric horse,

her mourning,

Carbon trees arch powder rivers, retarded June
mimes the race end. Scrape by, infant unheard of,
I must love the idea of the volume of aftermath—
what steeps more than madness in sunsets
nearly hymnal from the first
popular news of war. Still, the vulnerable sky is a pinup.

II. Big Wall

Where—it's caving in—
Birdseed time
I take ease
Here, crippling
A chapel stems
every foreign wall blessedness
with hymn.
Gray once
removed a readable birth, its surface
a tilt of early weather, pinkish.

There seems to be in the land
past the gravestones rubbing
up against the stifled hurt of their overgrown rose
memorials, some dive.
And in it it's the only adopted child I know
sleeps there under the root word sweet.

It speeds up over bridges, then dreams the once forming
in white stained glass
bells below gorged ringing out.

MARY CAPONEGRO

THE PRIEST'S TALE

Allow me, if you would, to tell you of a wedding, which took place not long ago, a wedding no different from any other—not objectively—in which I played my role to everyone's satisfaction, at least initially. For all I know, the bride might have been already with child when I performed the rite, but I would never be so crude as to count months upon my fingers when I hear of joyous news; for these very fingers may be called upon to cradle the wailing infant's tender head at christening time, to give him support as he enters new terrain, unaware of the security, solace, and spiritual wealth that define it. To him, at that moment, I must seem merely a stranger offering unfamiliar disturbing sensations. But later in his life he will realize the value of my gesture, and our bond.

The parents of this hypothetical child are perhaps another matter: the couple I recently wed, for instance; they were, in my opinion, naive. They did not realize the contract they were making—with me, that is—when they asked if I would sanctify their union. They assumed they could bid me good riddance, I expect, once the vows were exchanged, as if the rite were mere formality. How strangely they regarded me when—after I had played my role to the satisfaction of all, from the solemnity of the vows to the levity of the reception, chatting pleasantly, even wittily, with the parents, both sets, commenting in passing on the beauty of the bride, lest they think me at too great a remove from human experience—when there was a lull in the receiving line, I took the couple aside (who would question my doing it?) and asked if they would have me perform the Last Rites.

Without affectation or cynicism, I announced, "I live, as you know, in the rectory far away, and there is always the chance—though etiquette prohibits our acknowledging—that should you summon me at the last minute, I would be unable to reach you in time. There are so few of us, exiguously placed, and the parishes likewise scarce. The road to the rectory is seldom plowed in winter, and in spring the potholes impede smooth travel. When it rains, the roads turn almost instantly to clay, so that only at a skillful driver's hands and at high speeds can they be traversed successfully. If I were to administer the sacrament to one of you now, think of the time and anxiety we all might be spared, and the law of averages

indicates that the partner to receive this prophylactic blessing would likely be the party to require it later on. I realize it is hard to think ahead in the bloom of youth. . ."

The bride, aghast, clutched the arm of the man who only hours ago had been made, under my aegis, her husband, and challenged him by her fear to confront me, which he, quite eloquently did; no doubt a heroic effort to match my own eloquence and to impress her by trying to rhyme with my authority. "Father," he scolded, "what can be your intent? This is a time of rejoicing. You yourself pronounced the words, 'till death do us part.' Would you part us so soon then?"

Realizing that I had been misunderstood, I, who am an accommodating man—I do not proselytize, do not force myself—desisted (my objectives were unlikely to be understood within that public context—for heads were beginning to turn; those who had passed through the line were beginning to gravitate toward it again) and promptly took my leave, against the parents' puzzled protests: "Do visit us again soon, Father." And I had the sense, even as I gracefully accepted defeat, that I would see them all again soon enough.

Walking in town to collect myself, I realized there was another related visit I could make, to clarify what had been muddled. And so I sought out an acquaintance, or might one say, a colleague: the owner, as it happens, of a funeral home. Indeed, the bride and groom appeared surprised when I returned, accompanied, much later in the evening, to the family's house, where the wedding had taken place—the reception had been elsewhere, as is the custom. Little could they appreciate my willingness, my eagerness, to initiate them into a yet deeper mystery than the one upon which they had already, by laws of convention, embarked, allegedly for the first time. I even brought my friend the undertaker with me—he required considerable persuasion—to reinforce what might otherwise seem mere words, and to balance the awkwardness of a third party lest they misinterpret my intentions. The undertaker and I allowed no ambiguity in our presentation; we were straightforward, precise.

"I've come," he said, just as I instructed him, barely glancing at the two individuals he addressed, "to take the measurements for the casket. Would you be so kind as to lie apart, upon your backs, hands folded so, and I'll be through in no time." They seemed in shock, paralyzed, in their melded state, until the undertaker brought forward his implement to measure the bridegroom's member.

"All parts are parts of the whole," was his speech; "all shall come to dust." Meanwhile the groom hid himself the more deeply inside his bride, as if this would render the whole of him invisible. The bride's cry I could not pretend to interpret; perhaps she was pleased to offer him haven, or startled by his urgency; yet I would have thought the volume appropriate

to an instance of assault. The ruler may as well have been a dagger: such was her alarm. Or did she fear that to which she had been newly joined would be, by the former's measure, reduced. Who can possibly surmise the unbridled musings of the young in unfamiliar circumstances in a world relentlessly novel? I suppose in some ways the equanimity of a man of the cloth is an enviable thing.

Because I am a sincere man I must tell you that there is indeed advantage to the closet called confessional: one can be so close, intimate; only a thin screen separates oneself from the sinner, one's own sagacious voice from the whispers which reveal the deepest secrets. That is our special privilege; one might say power: that no one can justify surprise or suspicion when I appear on the other side of, by extension, any partition. There is, with me, potentially greater intimacy than that between a man and wife: one bound to breed resentment, foster ambivalence; for people are uncomfortable robbed of accusations: meddler, eavesdropper, peeping tom, spy; no one of these terms applies to a man of my vocation.

Father is the name by which all know me, the term by which I'm ceaselessly addressed. But was that the sound that echoed in mythic Dedalus's ears long after he'd watched the flesh of his flesh falling inexorably from air into water: Father? Father? I am the man who must give answers; thus expectation begets my ingenuity, for I want them prepared, as one does one's children. And I, like any parent, will never learn my sermon's lesson: that they must have their own experience; one cannot spare them. The more you try the more they will reject, be repelled—and thereby eject themselves from the sky? Seldom are they equipped to receive the truth, though one wants to believe sheer force of one's sincerity will smooth the roughest road, quarry hardest stone. Yet one must exercise caution, for sincerity is a dangerous thing.

It was caution dictated I depart, with my accomplice, allowing the other two to sort through their admittedly challenging instruction. A man in my profession must be bold, as He whom I revere was bold, but never reckless. The long journey back to the rectory is always an ideal opportunity for reflection.

As I might have guessed, no sooner had the season changed—or so it seemed; perhaps it had changed more than once—than I received a summons: I was needed. It must, I thought, be time for the baptism now. As my sense of direction is acute, my memory guided me accurately to the town, the tree-lined avenue, the stately Victorian house and inside it, the very chamber from which I had once been banished. I was unable to persuade the undertaker to accompany me at this time; from his point of view the prior experience had bred only humiliation. His profession has not taught him, as mine has, the value, the necessity, of perseverance. I would represent him, as I represented so many already. I had my vial of

holy water and prayer book in hand as I entered the house of the bride's parents, the same in which the ceremony had occurred. I assumed I would lead the family to the church after exchanging pleasantries, becoming reacquainted. Perhaps I would hold the child once we arrived, so that my hand upon him would not feel strange when the ritual was enacted.

But when I arrived, the cries I heard were not an infant's, but those of a mature woman, and that is how I came to grace the threshold of their chamber, for I ascended the staircase to investigate with the intention of assisting. As I squinted through the crack in the door, I saw the mother to be perspiring, panting, writhing, from time to time moaning in effort of that singular process of which I can perforce have no inkling, called labor, derived from Eve's seduction by a serpent. Even a husband, it is said, cannot soothe a woman during this arduous period; but I who as a priest possess potentially greater intimacy, thought to humbly offer solace.

"I am here," I said, through the crack which gave me witness.

"No," she screamed, I assumed to the source of her pain.

And when she repeated it over and over, I questioned whether contractions could be so frequent. I realized I possessed not even clinical knowledge regarding this miraculous yet commonplace event. I felt something akin to shame, before her next and more explicit statement jarred me from the sentiment: "It's that horrid priest again!" Her husband rushed to the door and said diplomatically, "There must be some mistake, Father; we sent for the midwife, to assist delivery. It was planned that we have a home birth."

I replied that I found it odd they had chosen this alternative with a hospital down the street.

"Father," the groom was losing his studied patience, "medicine—am I correct—is not your area of expertise, and our affairs are not your—he used His name in vain—isn't it obvious that my wife is in no condition to travel, even a short distance, at this stage? On the other hand, there is nothing to hold you here. If priests are in as scarce supply as you report, then I would not want it on my conscience that we had monopolized you."

As the groom spoke, admittedly with cleverness, I realized that the suggestion that served his convenience was not without substance, for if it was the case that the couple had not summoned me, then some miscommunication must have occurred through the secretary at the rectory, and some other couple required my ministrations in some fashion. But before I could take action, the most searing cry of all pierced the air, and the woman, to whom he turned again to face, and who had previously appeared distorted only in the distention of her abdomen, now manifested a most peculiar symmetry, for she possessed two heads, one at each end. We stood transfixed by this sight, suspended in time, in awe, until the bride herself corrected this anomaly as she pushed out, with disconcertingly

audible discomfort, through that chamber that will ever be a secret to me, a diminutive whole human being.

The completed act restored us to our senses and he dismissed me, saying, "Father, you must not distract me any longer. I have neglected my wife at her most critical hour. She must have no disturbance now. If you want to make yourself useful, you might go find the midwife for us." Then with his foot he closed the slender aperture that had been my access to the two, now three.

Although for reasons other than those the groom believed, it was, I felt, my duty to explore elsewhere. The hospital was my destination for there was very likely another couple, another newborn, with whom I had business, a family more receptive to that business. I recalled the pleasant and devout man and woman I had married quite some time ago, who had wanted nothing in the world as much as children, but the pregnancies had been in every case problematic; I knew not the details of the matter.

When I arrived at the hospital, after quietly exiting the house, I walked immediately to the front desk and offered the name of this prior couple. The nurse recognized my attire, and directed me to the room where the wife had recently given birth. The couple received me gratefully but they were not alone. A doctor was with them, as well as several, what I presumed to be medical students, peering at a Polaroid photograph. My presence did not distract them from their concentration, nor their discussion, the focal point of which seemed to be the ascription of blame, and which became increasingly agitated. I was, I eventually realized, too late, although I blessed the recently departed child, gone to God no sooner had he exited the womb, strangled by the very cord which bound him to his mother's nurture, in the act of being born. Ah, to witness life and death in such proximity; what more profound instruction could one receive? Although I was too late in one sense, the gift of this lesson was not denied me, and my duty was to offer it to those who could most profit from it. I granted myself permission to borrow documentation.

I hastened from the room to the corridor to the elevator and so on, until I was once again at the Callahan's residence. As I was the last to leave, the door had not been latched, so I let myself in; then, like a child, I took steps two at a time until I stood before their door. I knocked before entering.

"Kathleen," I cried, "David. There is something I must show you. Something you must see."

"Where's the midwife, Father?" David asked with little animation, concentrating on the pulsating cord that sustained mother and child as unity, clamped at two sites with paper clips, above which he held a small blunt scissors, moving them between two different sites only inches apart; unable to decide, it seemed, where to sever the bond, or simply unable to bring himself to make the cut. The thing which eluded him seemed to me

some dense but slender fish, perhaps an eel, caught between sea and land, its respiration intact despite its dislocation. Through the power of grace, it had not been an infelicitous agent in this instance.

"Here in my hand," I replied, "in my very hand." I held the picture to the light. "Kathleen," I whispered tenderly to her weary form, her sweat-drenched face. I knelt beside her, conscious of yet not repelled by the odor of sweat and flesh that pervaded the room, the sight of the bright white linen stained with blood. "This is for you."

She squinted at the image I held before her, then gazed at me incredulously before releasing a sound whose frequency seemed almost too high for human ears. Hurriedly, I veiled the truth again, covering what had been for a moment visible. Moments of the truth are all we can bear. And in the next, the midwife arrived (I heard Mrs. Callahan answer the bell, explaining that she refused to get involved; her participation had not been invited, and could anyone imagine how difficult it must be to listen to a daughter's cries and feel so impotent?)

The newest guest appeared before us, and promptly took charge. Regarding Kathleen's glazed eyes and distorted expression, (and no doubt informed by the shriek preceding her entry) she said, "What happened here?" David motioned toward me, using the legs of the scissors as a teacher might a pointer, but spoke no words. "Father, it would be better if you left me alone with her." Then she addressed the groom. "I'm sorry I was delayed. A breech birth at the hospital involved unforeseen complications and I was called in to help." After a pause, she added, "unfortunately to no avail." She gently released the rounded handles of the implement from David's grip, then lay her hand on Kathleen's forehead, and I was struck by how similar to a sacramental gesture was this contact. "David, you should accompany the reverend, since Kathleen will need complete rest to recover from the trauma. I doubt she'll be able to nurse."

After performing with expediency the maneuver the groom had been unable to execute, she lifted the tiny form, wrapped it carefully in a blanket she had brought and handed it to me, then quickly corrected herself, offering it to the groom. Once the bundle was dispensed with, she took the bride's wrist between her thumb and fingers, feeling for a rhythm I suspect she feared absent. "If only I could have gotten here on time," she said to herself, no longer communicating with the groom and myself; if anyone to the bride's vacant face. Then she repeated it, like a dirge.

Remembering our presence, she instructed and bid us depart, promising to send word when things stabilized. Who were we to doubt her? "It makes most sense for the baby to be cared for in maternity at the hospital, until Kathleen revives." She lay the infant in its father's arms, whispering, "such a lovely little boy." David followed me, reluctant but obedient, out the door, while she set about with her humble instruments, wiping,

sponging, disinfecting. We heard her strained but authoritative voice behind us: "And buy some formula, in the hospital pharmacy, in case we need it later."

My second trip to the hospital, then, was a simple twofold errand. David, as soon as we reached the building, adopted a rapid pace; I assumed that his strategy was to divide our errands for the sake of maximum efficiency. After clearing the front desk with a nod from the receptionist, I rode the elevator to the room where I had first been inspired by the photograph. Having been unprepared for Kathleen's strong reaction to it, I now wondered whether I needed to protect Anna from the reminder of what she had seen, as it were, in the flesh; of her flesh. Probably she too should not be disturbed, regardless of how welcoming the two appeared.

Discreetly I slipped the Polaroid under their door, the side bearing the image facing down, and rode the elevator back to street level to find the pharmacy. It was clearly marked and a woman from behind the counter offered me assistance.

"I have been instructed," I began, but could not manage to complete the sentence; it seemed awkward.

"There is a woman," I began anew. She raised her eyes. "Yes, Father?"

"A mother." She lowered them again.

"Her milk. . ."

"I understand perfectly, Father. There is no need to continue." And she turned her back to me to search the shelves behind her, before handing me a box approximately ten inches high. I felt inside my cassock for my billfold, but she placed her own hand over mine to stop me.

"Please, Father," she said. "We know about the tragedy. The hospital staff is very concerned, and supportive. Some of us feel the word"—she whispered it—"ashamed"—"is not too strong. In any case, do let this be our contribution."

"But, miss," I protested, fearful of appearing ungrateful or obtuse. "I am not certain I have made myself clear, or if I myself am clear, regarding the equipment that is. . .needed."

"I am a woman, Father," she said, with gravity, and unflinching gaze. "I know things you cannot know. Trust me."

I had no response to her authority and conviction. I could only go back to the Callahan's, perhaps not correctly but at least not empty-handed. David may have been required to remain with the child, and it was best for one of us to be available.

This time, however, I did not venture upstairs, but remained in the lower portion of the house, seeking refuge in a room, to the rear of the staircase—a room immaculate and austere containing a long oak table and eight matching straight-backed chairs with brocade seats, upon one of

which I sat. I slid the package to the far end of the polished table, then lay my head in my hands, resting this weight on the smooth wooden surface. After some time I lifted up my head, taking several deep breaths, the last exhalation interrupted by the appearance of Mrs. Callahan, mother of the bride.

"Father Faraday, what a lovely surprise! Have you come to say mass at St. Agnes?"

"No, Mrs. Callahan," I said, regaining my composure—a man who must attend, through the vehicle of a single sense, to a sequence of stories, of lives, of sins whose range spans from the barely worth mentioning to the most debased; a man who must juxtapose a session that represents the only confession in the life of an evil person with the routine inflated guilts of an exemplary practitioner; such a man has evolved the skill of flexibility, of quick recovery; to use the colloquial metaphor of our automobile-dependent culture, the ability to switch gears—"No, another appointment,"—there was no need to be specific—"now completed." Talking was easier than I'd anticipated, even reassuring.

"All the better, Father; you can join us then, for our Sunday meal," she said, unfolding an embroidered white cloth and spreading it over the table, letting it billow out as one might a bed sheet. I'm sure the children will be delighted."

"I wouldn't assume anything, Mrs. Callahan." I thought she had not heard me; she was already through the door, then back again, the first of numerous trips to heap the Lord's bounty onto the table; steaming platters, casseroles, a roast ready to be carved.

"You must excuse the children," she said, as if there had been no interruption to our conversation, and as she continued to lay out the meal, concluding with, as afterthought, a bottle of fine red wine, and another Waterford glass. "They are not beholden to tradition, as our generation was." She smiled at me, pausing in her activity. "They will appear when it suits them."

"Shall I begin carving?" I asked, as she began to light the candles in the candelabra, no trace of concern marring her flawless countenance as the flame drew nearer and nearer her slender fingers. I was fatigued, and felt less in command of my expressions. I feared Mrs. Callahan might have thought me greedy rather than eager to offer a gesture of assistance; I was ashamed of how much effort she had expended while I sat immobile in my temporary stupor.

"The one favor I would ask of you, Father Faraday, is to say grace for us, if it wouldn't be too much of an imposition—not until everyone arrives, of course." She sighed, and seemed to raise her voice slightly when she added wistfully, "if we could just for once all be together at table." She sighed again.

"Mrs. Callahan," I sought to console her. "I would urge you to consider that your daughter and son-in-law may be occupied with matters of some significance, and their absence is not necessarily an expression of indifference or hostility. Or, for that matter, ingratitude."

"No, indeed, Father," she replied, and with dignity continued, "but you, as a man of the cloth, are unlikely to be acquainted with that wrenching feeling, that torture of wanting to intervene, wanting to make available the wisdom of maturity, but knowing you must not surrender to it, for if you do, every strategy will go awry before your eyes."

Mrs. Callahan was visibly moved by what she shared, as was I to be receiving her words—more than she knew—and she permitted herself to digress: "Everything today is natural. But would the Lord have allowed man the mind to evolve technology if he meant him to be left to only natural devices? You are obviously the expert here, Father, excuse my. . .trespassing." She half-smiled. "I asked them, what is wrong with a good old-fashioned hospital? Now, I was a nurse, Father Faraday, before the Lord blessed our marriage with a child, and I know a bit about these matters, but we left to doctors the work of doctors and did not monkey around, if you'll excuse the expression, with life and death. There are risks, are there not, in every natural process?"

"You are a thoughtful woman, Mrs. Callahan."

"I suppose you might as well begin the carving," she said, resigned; "otherwise we may be waiting here until everything is cold." As I could infer the tenderness of the meat from its succulent aroma, I was more than willing to comply. "It is nice to have a man about, to lend a hand. My husband, you see, he's been. . .unwell."

"I'm very sorry to hear that." My memory of Mr. Callahan at the wedding: robust, energetic, was difficult to reconcile with these words—unless I confused him with the father of the groom; I did not think this was the case. And yet, our world fluctuates before us daily; appearances ever-unreliable indices of truth.

"The Lord works in mysterious ways; isn't that right, Father Faraday?"—as if she'd read my mind. I could not decipher her tone: conspiratorial, mocking, perhaps even. . .flirtatious? Fortunately, the moment of intense ambiguity passed.

"So much in life is confusing, isn't it? Nothing more so than being a parent in this day and age—I'm sure you've heard the stories, Father. In fact, I wonder if I might be so bold as to impose upon you for an even larger favor—since we may not get to grace, at this rate." She made an enigmatic gesture with her mouth, that seemed half sinister, half coquettish, or perhaps neither, some neutral expression colored by my fatigue? My job—I thank the Lord—is not to judge, outside a certain circumscribed, sacred enclosure. "My daughter, I'm convinced, is in need of guidance, guidance

beyond my capacity. I thought marriage would make a difference, but I'm afraid that in some ways, it's only made things worse, and I wondered—I thought, perhaps, if you went up, and spoke with her. . ."

"I would like to very much, Mrs. Callahan," I said sincerely, "very much indeed; but there are times when no one, not even a man of God, can take the place of a mother." As I said the last word I rose to procure the package that had remained undisturbed (but for Mrs. Callahan's occasional furtive glances)—then returned to the seat, placing on the table its contents: a box which I began to push toward her slowly.

"What can it be?" she asked, staring at the thing as if it would speak its name.

I continued to push with my fingers the device I had purchased at the hospital pharmacy. Both of us regarded its incremental progress as a child might a caterpillar's. It whispered across the tablecloth: my fingers its gentle engine. When the box had achieved sufficient distance to be within close range, I drew back my hand and remained silent while she studied the labelling. Mrs. Callahan blushed, giggled, and then rose, smoothing the front of her blouse. "You are admirably down to earth, Father Faraday, and yet so. . .discreet. Please do help yourself while I have a brief chat with my daughter." She grasped the box, tentatively at first, but then walked decisively out of the room, to the stairs. Would Kathleen be conscious? Would her mother's presence rouse her if not, and stimulate her healing? I hoped it would be so, but my own hunger distracted me from this concern.

In truth, I could not remember the last time I had eaten. Had I even had breakfast? I carved a few slices of beef—it should certainly not go to waste, this bounty—and there was no point in serving Mrs. Callahan's portion only to watch it grow cold. I passed myself the green beans, the roast potatoes. With the first bite, I realized I was ravenous. What a relief it was to nourish myself without the burden of conversation, to leave the world, for just a few moments, to its own devices.

I ate much more rapidly than was salubrious. Perhaps this was the source of my indigestion, although I suspect it had more to do with the bride's raised voice, followed by the shattering of glass. I laid down my fork, went back to the living room, and leaned against the bannister once again, wincing at the words toward which I could not keep myself from straining.

"You're positively Medieval, Mother." At least the bride possessed the energy to raise her voice. The midwife had either cured her: one of the innumerable daily miracles we take for granted, or misapprehended the situation from the start. Perhaps the former was now with David and the child, and all would return shortly.

"Darling, that is very discourteous. The breast pump was a gift from Father Faraday."

"The priest! Mother, you must be kidding. That man is very peculiar."

"He's not a man exactly, is he—a priest? But I think he's quite nice, dear, and you were rude to him."

"No, mother, he was. . .cruel to me; you can't imagine."

"I'm sure you exaggerate, Kathleen; he performed the ceremony so beautifully. He keeps in touch, and you can tell he cares. I sense he's very . . .trustworthy."

I slowly climbed the stairs, no more rapidly than I had pushed the problematic box, now discarded. I climbed almost against my will. Certain projects seem to have no end in sight, before we gain the profit of perspective. Yet we must never cease to strive, to hope. It seemed that the voices grew muted as my proximity increased.

"Mother, I feel nervous when I know he's around, and I'm feeling weak as it is. We need a quiet place to talk. There's just too much going on here, and he is a man after all, no matter what any of you say."

"Well of course, dear, technically, that's true. But a priest is a special kind of man, and if you can't trust a priest, whom can you trust? It isn't as if he were Episcopalian; they have wives and worse. Father Faraday is a good old-fashioned Catholic priest. And insofar as he's a man, what's wrong with having a man around the house?"

I was right against the door now, squatting to make my eye level with the keyhole. There was a long pause in their conversation.

"Mother," the bride said suddenly—with urgency and a noticeable maturity— no longer whining, "if I asked you to follow me somewhere, would you?"

"That depends, Kathleen. What I mean is, of course I would, if it seemed reasonable, but don't you think you'd be better off resting for a few days?—here where there are people to look after you, a familiar environment, the comforts of home. . ."

"No, I don't mean to go away from here, to travel, but you have to promise not to ask any questions, just to go with me."

I was curious myself as to the destination the bride had in mind, although slightly distracted by the pain in my knees, a sensation with which I am well-acquainted, and have, over the years, developed the stamina to endure.

"You are being very mysterious, young lady, but your mother will go along."

"Thank you, oh thank you, Mother, because I discovered just the perfect place while I was having my contractions, and I was afraid it might . . .disappear—I mean I might forget it—just like when you have a dream sometimes, that's so vivid and powerful but then you can't remember anything specific the next day, or even an hour later."

I watched the bride splay her legs; she spread them as far, it seemed, as legs could separate, and farther still—perhaps she had as an adolescent

performed the acrobatic maneuver called a split; she might have been a cheerleader—it seemed it must be terribly uncomfortable but this time she uttered no cries, not a sound, as they, adopting what appeared an exaggerated yoga position, crept inside, one after the other, to be embraced by those contours which are even in the imagination, forbidden to the man who inhabits, as vocation, a chamber of secrets. I heard them twice removed now, as if under water.

"I must admit I feel a bit uneasy here, Kathleen; would you do me the favor of telling me where we are?"

"Well, it's hard to say exactly where, but I can tell you how I found it. In the excruciating and terribly lonely pain of labor, when all of me was opened up, I felt almost delirious, and yet very. . .present, painfully connected to what was happening, and in between contractions I just decided I should be able to inhabit that space myself, in a soothing way; a therapeutic way, I guess you could call it. Shouldn't the haven we give others be available for us too? Doesn't that seem right to you, mamma? Anyway, suddenly I was in a place I'd never known, but that I wanted to come back to, and when I saw you now, I knew I had to bring you with me. I'm very glad you agreed to come." The two women had no suspicion that they were in some fashion exposed to the practiced ear of the man whose profession is to listen though a membrane to all the world's secrets.

"No one would ever think to look for us here."

"I suppose you're right, dear. But what if someone should need either of us? I don't feel right to be unavailable. We do have company, after all. I've always prided myself on being a perfect hostess."

"But mother, we've only just arrived. Stay a while. Besides, it's only fair I reciprocate," the bride said, after a brief pause. "My first journey in this world was through a room just like this, that you guided me through. Then somehow we grew estranged from one another."

"You make it all sound a bit tragic, Kathleen, when we've been having such a pleasant, such an interesting visit. I really don't know what you are referring to. And might I suggest you consider the word estrangement in relation to your own son and husband? But you always take offence when I try to remind you of your responsibilities, even though my only concern is your happiness."

"Oh yes, let's not get into it, Mother, I didn't mean anything by it. I love being here with you where it's so embracing, yet expansive too, as if it might extend beyond infinity."

"Such a lovely way of putting it; you are your mother's daughter, aren't you? And I will certainly come again, if I'm invited. If nothing else, it's educational. It shows me just how much we have in common."

It seemed their session had terminated but it was hard to assess, something of the sensation one has during an overseas phone conversa-

tion: its disorienting static and delays in transmission of sound.

"Is this the exit, honey?"

"You go first, Mama."

Mrs. Callahan's next words were clearly articulated; no longer did they sound submerged, murky, as I watched the mesmerising reemergence of the two women. The bride seemed to turn inside out; I have no other words, as inadequate, as pedestrian as these are; I was reminded of the way certain of nature's creatures shed their skins. The bride was again lying in the bed; indeed she had never stood during the entire expedition, and her mother was back at her side, seated, now dabbing inside the bodice of the bride's dressing gown with a linen cloth.

"My breasts feel so swollen." The daughter's plaintive voice addressed her mother.

"Of course they do; they *are* swollen," the latter replied as she continued to execute the dainty motion with the cloth, the inadequacy of which brought to mind the image of the Dutch boy's finger in the dike.

"It's a pity you destroyed that breast pump, dear; rather reckless of you."

"It was in a moment of passion."

"Ah, yes. Where did you say David went? Not to mention my grandchild."

"To investigate something, I think. I'm not really sure. Things are a bit strained between us, actually."

"No doubt. Well, if we don't do something soon I'm afraid you're going to burst, and we can't have that. There is mess enough around here as it is. I suppose that midwife gave you some lactating stimulant. I've never heard of milk coming in quite this early in such. . .volume. I'm going to have to take matters into my own . . ." She hesitated, looked uncharacteristically tentative, for clearly she lacked a destination or function for the parts of herself to which her ellipsis metaphorically alluded. As her voice trailed off, I saw Mrs. Callahan gently, furtively affix her mouth to her daughter's breast, to relieve it of the nourishment meant for another which burdened it so. The bride winced. "Could you try to be gentler, Mother?" she asked. "They're a bit tender, since this is the first time."

Mrs. Callahan obligingly removed her lips from the darkened protuberance no longer veiled by white fabric. She awaited permission as an accompanist awaits the signal from another instrumentalist to initiate music, so as to create all the more precisely unity of sound and feeling.

And when that signal came, and she lowered again her head to grasp with her lips what hands would not be useful for, a stream of pale white squirted out, startling us all. I nearly toppled over but repositioned to correct myself, careful to utter no sound. The bride's mother also made adjustments; she appeared to take a deep breath and then, after one

unsuccessful attempt, arrested the stream. With enviable dexterity, she reached, while thus occupied, toward the couple's dressing table to retrieve a crystal bowl, into which she released, in an astoundingly refined fashion, the translucent whitish liquid from her mouth, the latter which she dabbed with the same linen cloth. Ignoring the unimpeded flow, she breathed again, and said, "I only wish I had two mouths." Valiantly she resumed her relief measures, acquiring an almost graceful regimen of intake and release, growing, it seemed to me, increasingly acclimated, mother and daughter both, approaching a state of trance-like serenity.

Now I am an efficient man, as I have said, and it troubled me to think of the ignored twin of the bride's mammae, engorged as it was unattended. Mrs. Callahan, pragmatic woman that she was, had obviously elected not to attempt a system of alternation, fearing the rhythmic complications of leaking and squirting. It had never occurred to me, until that moment, that a baby might nurse from both a mother's breasts, in careful sequencing. Already today I had learned a great deal, primarily with the aid of sight, the sense that is not usually my instructor. But having thus benefited from observation, was it not my duty, now, to intervene? So often we men of the cloth are accused of being 'out of touch' with the pragmatic needs of our parishioners, particularly alienated from the needs of women, and inhabiting a comfortably ethereal realm. I looked into my heart and knew I had to overcome my resistance; sometimes matters far less grand than exorcising demons were well worthy of a priest. Such contact, though it be ostensibly at odds with propriety, and with my own inclinations, would be the gift that I could offer. The analogy of artificial respiration seemed fitting: this sort of detachment, yet commitment and intensity.

I crept into the room, literally, for I would need to remain on my knees —I am well practiced—for this novel process. Neither stirred and I made only the softest sounds.

"I am here." I whispered it so softly that it might have been an angel's voice, or strand of dream. And the bride's gasp was likewise a subterranean response to dreamt image or sensation, when I took into my mouth the darkened mounded center of the aureole, controlling my distress to find it already wet, leaking in fact, all the while that Mrs. Callahan attended its twin. The breast itself was hard, like a boulder, but with a quality of translucence, blue veins protruding through the flesh. I had the unique opportunity to use as visual instruction the template across from me, and let this be my focus, rather than the disconcerting image immediately before me. I was prepared now for the energy with which its contents would gush forth. I moved my lips, and not my teeth, in time with Mrs. Callahan's, and found, by some small miracle, a rhythm that seemed appropriate to Kathleen's needs. Inadvertently I glanced at the crystal bowl to see that within the clearer fluid, resembling white water color paint,

some globules of fat had collected. I managed to check, at first, an impulse to gag, but after this sight, the taste—for I could not approximate Mrs. Callahan's demure dexterity in spitting out every drop of the substance to make room for more—of the cloyingly sweet liquid overwhelmed me. Already, it took all my concentration to be one with it. But certainly my training should have equipped me with the discipline required to transcend my squeamishness, to put mind, and spirit over matter, in order to overcome the body's limitations.

And so I did. A silent prayer of thanks. And just as when one engages in physical exercise, and after passing a certain threshold of pain, gains momentum and achieves sustained transcendence, I too felt altogether delivered from my limitations. Such a strange suspension this state was, to be intensely present yet entranced: unique in my adventures as a servant. I felt no impatience whatsoever, only a curiosity as to how long a milk-filled mother's breast required to empty its contents. My only reference was a single farming experience one summer as a boy, tentatively touching a cow's udder—the farm hand laughing, "That won't get you anywhere, little feller, ya gotta use some muscle," as she squeezed my arm to add emphasis before demonstrating the far more vigorous maneuvers required to make the milk squirt into the silver pail. She might, I supposed, be proud of me now—though the bishop would demand an explanation.

Most unfortunately, the indigestion which was engendered when I indulged in gluttony over Mrs. Callahan's repast, followed by hearing the bride's reproach and finally by coming to the aid of a woman—who happened to be the same as she who had reproached me—in distress, now welled up in my gut anew, and I was ashamed of my weakness. Mortal that I was, I would have to admit my subservience to the body. Such a vast intake of milk for an unaccustomed adult system was, I suppose, bound to result in some degree of gastric distress. I thought it best to absent myself before either woman 'awakened,' for certainly my becoming ill would be no contribution to the situation. My gift would be left unsigned, as it were, and how happy this made me, for this is the joy of my vocation: to help without ostentation, to offer subtle assistance without expectation of boast or virtue. We must give freely even when—especially when—the gift entails sacrifice; even when we would wish nothing so much as to have the cup pass from our lips.

It seemed in many ways the opportune time to go. I am a man of God and I had done what I could for the family. There were other families: a vast world in need of instruction, and I myself with so much to learn. In some other sense, however, I had just arrived; for my observance of these women, and the unique form of my participation in physiological processes that had remained for the greater part of my life abstract, had been instructive in a way I could not define or assimilate. Feeling thus

overwhelmed made me want to flee, and yet I was to an equal degree entranced. Perhaps if I rested here with them, as quiet as I had been all this time, I could become for them, a part of their landscape, a part of their life. I had the sense that they had been changed by their visit with each other, as most certainly had I by my covert interaction.

Here the undertaker had no place, it seemed. And my own truths seemed disturbingly incomplete. What could I learn from this? How could I apply these lessons? In so many senses, failure felt the order of the day.

Why, then, could I not pull myself from the room, from the sight of the two women, one of with whom I had had particular and unprecedented carnal interaction, for which I had no reference and lacked all vocabulary. I wished her to regain normal consciousness; felt, in fact, that I kept vigil to it— and yet it was this very transformed appearance that mesmerized me— for I am a man of ritual, am I not, performing every day again and again an invisible transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary: bread into body, bread into body, but that body seen only in mind. Was my nausea and near-vertigo perhaps my own body's excuse to remain?— weakness a catalyst for instruction: Address your ignorance, servant, in order to better be that which you were meant? Humble yourself before the creatures made of Adam's rib, made of man, but who themselves make men?

I myself had seen the process; participated, in some sense, its perpetuation— though all my efforts likely misinterpreted as thwarting. From sacred texts, from prayer and from my superiors, had come my instruction in the past, but where was I now led? As they reclined, I too would recline, but apart from the bed, here in the corner, where I could witness, but not disturb; reflect upon the role I had played in their sustained interaction. Instinctively I took out my pen: "My children, ladies and gentlemen, good people,"—I put a line through each in turn—"brothers and sisters in Christ"—all addresses seemed prosaic, formulaic—"I would ask that you reflect today on something rather esoteric, something challenging and perhaps initially off-putting. Christian responsibilities are far more complex than they first appear, than we might have learned through the catechism lessons of our youth. Consider me, if you would, a kind of. . .midwife, who mediates collectively your birth in Christ, your baptism into new life. You must remind yourselves, should you ever feel mistrustful toward me, that my sole purpose on this earth is to assist you, as your servant."

No sooner had I penned the words than I began to feel some mitigation of the turbulence within my bowels. Realizing that these were indeed the means through which I could calm myself and my digestion, I preceded with the outline for my homily.

GEORGE ECONOMOU

CENTURY DEAD CENTER

ONE

When it happened it didn't happen in newsreel. Its history happens to. Easier to take home in black and white and head off the passing moment through the air, so sharp and short. He dies from a burst to the chest in a second, hangs from the boots forever. When it happened it was real news. Then turned black and white. Death's proof develops in black and white till it comes as news for you, real and stark and possessing the air it passes through on its way to the black and white house where it rewinds and waits.

TWO

There wasn't any blood. Still it was read and flowed for generations. Of poison. For centuries of poison. The immunity was colossal. Its epidermal imprint: tracing veins monumental and saturated. Whose inner walls never showed. Not until their bursting point. Then there was blood. Assayed, drop by drop, for centuries. Generations. The poisonous immunity. Painted with used bandages. Wrap and tie, wrap and tie. Educed, the poison knot. For generations. For centuries. To the bursting point. Time for some blood again.

THREE

The archaeologist begins talking. Her elbows and ribs ache. Nothing she says lines up with her knee-prints. Nothing she feels can fill their bowls in the sand. She stands up, they disappear, fatten the air. There are things about her life she cannot retrieve. Remember as needing it, even. Right now she can think only about hot tea and ice water. Wanting to fill herself with them. And to talk a little longer. Again, she kneels and bends over her prey. Stops talking. No one sees her put in the final touches. Which takes hours. All out.

FOUR

You should be able to get there by foot. Besides there's no other way. No other choice. For you. Even if you had a map, there would be surprises. Bad to worse. So prepare. Point yourselves in this black direction. Let us keep it nameless. Like your destination. For now. So if you don't get there, you've still gotten there. In a manner, bad to worse, of speaking. A map? We will make one up for you. Name of your destination? Let us put it this way. If you get there from here, it's another way of getting from bad to worse. We guarantee it.

FIVE

And the wife tied herself to her dying husband and they fell into the water—from the villa chamber overhanging the lake. A legend tells a lady pushed her lover and he fell into the lake from a point high above the water. Storied faithless lovers trip, the true leap. The poet strips her fingers of her rings and wears her mother's fur. True to the fear overhanging her perforated days, she rises to a point high above her balance and falls into the lake of fumes and fading music. Torn from life's book, she trips into story.

SIX

The mythomaniac's talking his guts out. His waving hands move back horizons. The others step lively to keep up with him. Sky. His anecdotes secure with them, down to earth with them. Tumbling, then fettered to eye and ear. Slowed up to meet their measure. They cannot stand to talk to him. They cannot stand not to listen to him. They tread water he walks on. Cannot keep up with him. They cannot help but slow him down. A rope and a rock, or a noose and a knife. Still they will listen, rapt, to the last sounds he shoots.

SEVEN

The unspeakable. May be screamed. Sung into remembrance. Who most listen for it to the capture are speechless in its honor. Then spill. Submit to its surrendering in them. White flags of terror turned to dreams of lost and found. So the-couldn't-be-worse is finally something to write home about. Put it this way. What good is all the evil we've done if we do not speak of it? The unspeakable. May be screamed. Worn like a badge. A tattooed number. A poem. Let the record show: on Justitia's tab. Then hold your peace or jump.

EIGHT

The prophet wants a good feed. Even if he has to fast for it, as long as it comes sooner or later as ordered. Proof well-worth the wait. It's in the eating. Order that justifies this mess of explanations and excuses: this steady diet of phenomenals. So the prophet waits and works in the dark room of his desire where he alone sees his proofs coagulate. He picks at them lightly, his taste buds awakening to their salty continuity. Then mouths the full picture and swallows it whole, even if it curdles the blood, it's a feast of cogency. Wait.

NINE

At first the cries were music to their ears. The march of life. Step. Fuck. Step. Stop to have a portrait taken: Proud Papa in Brown Shirt holding the Infant Christa. A composition worth careful study. And the music, the music was colossal. Filled the air from sea to lung. And the terrified new cries were lost in its volume. Work. Much work to be done. To the music. To the march. To found the center of the century. Black hole on earth. End of the line and final pitch where the wailing infant flies from his hand into an open grave.

TEN

There is always a chance that in some corner five or six will join hands in a dance to their happy, good hour. You can be sure they'll eventually twirl out of the picture, though the black iconography of their chance always lingers there. Traces of the saving vision they will kill each other for. To have been holding hands in that circle, to have filled one of those spaces of touching choreography, is their dream. To launder death. After all they have done and made of their matters. There is always a chance. In some corner. To slip white.

GAEL TURNBULL

FROM ESTUARIES

STARTING AGAIN

Starting again. . .two words. . .and now more words already picked, marked past and strictly, as if by imposing choice to sustain conviction,

inflicting whatever need on silence and, as quickly, reaching to a convergence, even a stricture

as of an edge applied, driven down and to the quick, what's sensed, what's bourne, may come to birth in us, be heard, who are of the quick,

who hear those other words, not in contradiction although gone before, long started, quickened, and by them, the dead, their words with ours, not dead, but quickening.

STARTED

Started. . .and so begun, have already said too much to guess where this may lead, as if a knotted cord I wind into my hand and follow into a maze,

finding amazement, what is meant, as meaning, as intention, and yet tensed, intended, not pretending or dissembling,

listening to the words, assembled, gathered, what is understood, as what may stand, may not be shifted

but which yet proceeds, goes forward to arrive, from where it started, as this does, and has.

VOIDS

An idiot child once took a man to show him a pit in the forest where bodies of hostages had been thrown and while they looked, a rat disturbed a shoe so that it appeared as if one of the corpses was waving its foot to them.

The child wanted to laugh but knew just enough not to do so; and the man, not wanting to laugh but knowing altogether too much, in what way could he?

(adapted from "Charnier D'Otages" by Jean Tardieu)

PRETENDING

A sparrow has found a crust and a crow is after it, harrying the smaller bird which dodges neatly, a lifetime of practice, until the larger bird gives up or appears to, perching on a branch, pretending it doesn't care, far enough away to hope to persuade the sparrow to relax but still near enough to pounce,

while the sparrow takes its time, enjoying the crust, fluffing its feathers, flicking its tail, making a show of pretending, as if the crow wasn't there.

TIDES

Lappings of day as each dawn shifts its coming sooner, to summer's highest tide, then back to winter's ebb,

revealing mud flats of the night exposed where we may venture, fearful perhaps but curious to find what the glare of too much light may have concealed.

CAMBRIDGE

For months, determined to ask a girl whom he saw each day, spoke with, to come for afternoon tea at his lodging, and always failing, until even the resolve failed him, turning back to shadows, self regard, long walks alone

but also, for a few moments, perhaps longer, the great telescope to his will, scanning out into a beyond always beyond, a dust of suns out of the darkness, where his self was of no consequence, even to himself.

MAKINGS

Might a shape of words be realised as if by remarking upon the simplest outline of a twig breaking the surface of a subsiding river, to be gripped, dragged from the mud, dried on the bank, made manifest

as the eroded branch of some far-off, storm-shattered tree, in its gratuity of detail quite beyond all expectation of a first intent

or contrived upon principles seen in an asymmetric and rotary pendulum with flail arm, where the long term pattern depends on the initial impetus

but which becomes particularised because of nonlinear effects built into the design, with ability to confound recurrence, never settling to a steady state and always possible with surprise?

BEYOND THE GLASS

Surprised in a mirror, not by my father's face as if my age, but by glimpse of that lad he was, that I was once, not unaware but as yet unwary, eager for all that was to come,

never thinking that some day I'd look, surprised, into a mirror, see that former self, both his and mine, remote yet near, as if untarnished, still present as shared presence, not just in the mirror but surprised in me.

JUNIPER

Burning juniper on the fire and as the scent fills the room, there's suddenly the presence of a time not now and a place not here

so specific and immediate it's as if the answer to some first and final question has been revealed and is to be found only in what is lost at every moment.

GEORGE ANGEL

FIVE PROSE POEMS

The stone is dead. The window was left open. This is the tin I was saying. Again on the pane cajoling. In the of but yes again summer. See there was some history of angels on the wrapping paper, tire marks roll an oil drum that had known a child's limbs inside it, snouting the wind and closing its fingers into its palms. The knife is open and married to the air. The bare feet lifted and patted the dirt again. They were driven out of the clock tower of night. They were driven toward palaces. They were beaten when every pair of open palms became the wings of a fallen body. They became They said again They when their heads became stamens and the road was covered with pollen. I saw them walking, I saw that each was a beggar. I tied my apron on, imagining a city of chess pieces as windowless buildings. I climbed the stairs and closed the yellow door behind me. I often see ghosts in summer. If I were to tell someone they would look in my eyes, mimic my jaw, and laugh. I speak only with the angels rising from the wrapping paper.

The word blood is dead. The word knife, the word angels, the word stone, the word bones. All these words are dead. Word angels like monkey dying. The theory of trees and stones must crawl inside them and crack them open forever. These words are the corpses of what we know. They are as useless as the word maggots that will come along and eat them. Say land again and you too are dead. Land is a dead word. The theory of trees and stones humbly submits that it is tired of the words light and strong. These words must be assassinated so that we may all see that they have been dead for ages. Every sayable word is a dead word. Run faster, killing as you go. Every explanation is a beautiful vulture. We have made it beautiful. The colors are all dead and we have fed them to the vulture.

Saying is killing. Laughter is mockery where a massive bright bird stands pecking the sinew out of the arms and legs of light. The theory of trees and stones is someone remembering something to himself. God is not the word for God.

SEPTIC

A scarebird sleeps for me in a thicket grown above its head. Your breathing clears. Scarcely folding and putting away something seen, a visit. An out-scrape of the face. A bus light lets go a nasturtium in the dark. The thicket rolls away, its sticks to a piled figure are bones of breathing. Scaffolding building. Its leaving erases, my blindness begins to plant there. An unseen bird tripped above us on a gust of air. Its surprised flutter lifts our looks. Two seeds that aspired to argue, supplant, fell and shattered on the asphalt.

Gone, those exhausted from the window frames where the light had been eaten off of the cob of apartments. Dim devily street, like a quilted sheet. I hear you snore and I tickle your feet. You don't tickle my feet, you tap my head. And without my heat you'd be cold in bed. The black that hung hit against the high windowed risks, hurrying over them to twist the snout of an all but cornered glow. A monarch who flipped frantically along the air outside the walls is gone. The maze of day is still there.

OCTAVE

A draft and the lowering sound of someone passing come in joined. As always angels help me halfway into the air where I've drowned. The blue that broke over the street was like a wave about to laugh. Still, the new fish that shone just coined were free to swim about my feet. An old codger and his missis will find them wriggling in their hair. Branches obscure the meadow where light first broke open its kisses. A reproduction that was

faded in a store upon the square. On closer inspection a tear, a smudge, and an edge badly frayed.

This sun nesting, retouched, flashes and yet I hear your voice instead. The swift light continues to rend and appears itself with slashes. A lit filament delivers a little snap you might still send. Within the words where you have led me I find resounded slivers. Round blunt wresting shoulders adjust the living weight they can afford. Blooming sinks to put your feet in, you laughed at flowers and their lust. You bring wires to conduct a rare spread of wings that are not beaten. I find their feathers now restored and so turning just, I go there.

NOVENA

Thousands of willful streamers come fluttering between the apartments. Too numerous for defeat, they rule alone the flashing browns with which they tinge the light. Their current of folding and unfolding moves falling with the decline of the street, wrapping the slanted wires with flight. The silt risen from some enervement. Their passage down the street is slow, rippled with invisible pulls. The first full moon of the season was the night before last night. This blanket lifted from the bed to cover the window and fool sleep. Still the light seeped through and the blanket muttered in the breeze

Noli me tangere, said the shadow of a gardener I was looking for. I finally found her and we went to buy orangeade at half-price at the store.

The face of things breaks open. You climb up into the fissure where leaves, ring-stained, extend as steps to where veins have bloomed their stationary wealth. Red geraniums in pots upon the shelf are untouched by the wind that has risen up. Someone wandering came to loot this place. Corolla where your voice has put its root. You turn and drop a stone upon my foot. I chase your sight and now the sun is gone. Promising light, asking us to come run.

PIERRE JORIS

THE CASE OF THE MISSING "M"

Somewhere along the line an M went on the lam (but already language asks for correction: it was no line, at least no straight line, not even a well-designed symmetrically-correct curve, but rather something "en pointillé," a needlework crisscrossing like tracks in the snow, uneven, hobbling, appearing/disappearing, a scar left on water & air & earth, a now-you-see-it, now-you-don't nomadic "ligne de fuite" but maybe we'll have time to come back to this question later.) Let's start here, with that missing letter. This seems to happen all the time as I write. Letters go missing. Or just one, to begin with. A letter goes missing. For example, & among others, an "M"—the letter that opens the word "missing," leaving something like (h)issing, where the "h" in between the parenthesis rhymes with the Arabic hamsa, the unsounded letter, though here it is more like a speech impediment, im-pedes-ment, in that there are pedes, feet, limbs, & immediately we got trouble, trouble in paradise, trouble walking, getting our, well, my feet caught, though this is not the infamous swollen foot, that oedipal thing, or then maybe again it is, under another guise, one I would call richer, in that it involves becoming/remaining an eternal toddler. But I don't really want to begin with the family scene, those ugly "scènes de famille." I'm not in anybody's pharmacy right now, thus also in no need for a scapegoat, this is another shop, the body-shop of language maybe, where the letters get put together & as happens with watches or other machinery, you take one apart because you think it's not working the way it should & put it back together & it works but you're astounded that a little screw or weirdly shaped piece is left over, you don't know there it fits but immediately it seems more essential to you than the rest of the coherent machine. Here's how this happened in this poem from 1986:

0.45 a.m.
after the storm

(a lecture/reading first performed at Small Press Distribution in Berkeley, California in the Spring of 1990)

the flat
lineaments of
word
I
meant
world a letter
on the lam
a greek
lamb-
da / fort
missing the
eleventh leg
—not a wooden
—not a toy
of this journey
though it is
the meat we eat
in this house
after the storm
the skies
washed
dangling
limbs
lamdas
fort
where we
fiction our
selves to be
at one

But the letter I was thinking of was that first letter of the word missing, which is also the first letter of the word mother. This is what happened to the language: it went from mother-tongue to other tongue. At times when I stand up, on my own two legs, limbs, like right now in front of you, I have the hubris to claim that it was I who lopped it off, though when I sit down & face my job, writing, it becomes clear that this letter fell off on its own accord somehow & that it is in the gap between mother-tongue/other-tongue that I am written. This gap, this emptiness is liable to take my breath away. It is the closest I've come to understanding what someone like Edmond Jabès means when he talks of the void, of emptiness, the desert, that interface between language and the world, or what Michel Foucault meant when he wrote:

> "The only thing we know at the moment, in all certainty, is that in Western Culture, the being of man and the being of language have never, at any time, been able to coexist and to articulate themselves one upon the other. Their incompatibility has been one of the fundamental features of our thought."

It is the putting into question, i.e. into play, of a certain absence, in & through language. The overriding presence of an absence. But as I write this, as I try to find words to talk about "it," I realize that the ones I found force me into a specific, ever overdetermined way of thinking through this problem, and in the case of these last sentences what rears its head under the English I am using is French, if not the French language as such, then the way that language has of thinking what it is given to think in binary oppositions, in the gallic logic of either/or, of absence or presence, and it was way back, over twenty years ago now, when the decision was taken by me, or when the decision made me, (to keep playing on the passive/active opposition in the absence of an actual "middle voice" in American prose) exactly in order to escape that binarism that I "decided" not to write in French. I'll come back to this, & to where I came/come from, but first some words, laid out on the page as a poem, dealing with the costs of those choices. It—the choice, the decision, whatever it was that led me to write in English—it, then, used to create much anxiety which I could only alleviate by, paradoxically, writing in that other tongue that is not the mother-tongue. And that anxiety would at times become the very poem, as in this text from the early seventies:

> ANGUISH, A RIDDLE
> that all the languages are borrowed
> but how then do I count them
> that do not belong to me
> In the first
> I think in the second I sink
> the third is my rhetoric &
> the fourth my west &
> wagon its wheel
> at least traces these steps
> in harmonies of tetradic modalities
> before & after I sink.

The fascination, all my life with the number four. On one level, clearly the number of languages I am most familiar with built into a cosmo-topography, the four corners of the worlds, the directions; but also, another layer of it, the need to escape the three, as "scene-de-famille" (so maybe

we can never get away from that completely) & again & certainly at a very conscious level of work, the attempt to break the hold of the trinitarian number that has been the essential mode of the re-presentation of complexity—or of re-ducing complexity—in European thought since Dante's time. Four is the first difficult number. One is the easiest no matter what they say, & it is also easy to get from there to two and then to get three out of two, but after that there comes a quantum jump, breaking the triangle, the triangulation, try "strangulation," because as Bucky Fuller showed so convincingly, the triangle is indeed the most solid, i.e. fixed, unalterable & thus containing, re- & op-pressing geometric structure in the world. Typing up notebooks from last year I came across these few lines, that I can't remember having written, & I certainly can't remember what I thought as I was writing them, which isn't, I believe, such a rare occurrence in the process of writing—at least for me. This obsession with the numbers comes through again:

A BEGINNING
four is as far
as
this carries us,
beats
three, beats three
beats
three.

So there is this anxiety, induced by the implacability of the numbers, but the anxiety is also often alleviated, or leavened by playfulness. Thus in the earlier poem the play with & on a phoney- or phono-logy of three pronunciations: "thinking / singing / sinking/" A hair on the tongue, that hair it takes to get the English "th" out, something that still marks or mars my speech, like a defect, or a sign, simply. Something that for me, at least, has rhymed with other slightly askew ways of looking at the world, for example, Robert Duncan's roving eye. I may have preferred to be marked in my vision, rather than in my speech, or at least that sense came through in a small poem written in flight over the North Atlantic a few years ago:

O that I had Duncan's eyes
to see & hold both
this America that Europe
planisphere of my senses
fine mercator mesh grid
of this my prison earth

Or maybe, what I really wanted was Duncan's tongue, the incredible sense one had in listening to him that he was at one, or at home in this tongue, the uncanny ability he had of regenerating himself by going back to the stories—& they were of one language-piece—of his childhood, to that treasure-trove that was so important to him. My childhood, language-wise, was atomized—no, not atomized, as that would imply some sort of preexisting actual totality somehow more or less randomly fragmented; it was rather as if my gaze, my language-gaze if I may say so, went through a prism and was broken up into a spectrum of languages or vice-versa, to turn this image around, it was as if a rainbow spectrum of language-particles flew at me and were all supposed to go to some prism in my ear or wherever where they are supposedly re-aligned into a single white beam of light understanding itself. My first spoken language was Luxembourgian, this Frankish-mosellan dialect that both father & mother & sister spoke. But between the ages of two and twelve I had nursemaids who spoke German, uncles & aunts who spoke French. And the essential encounter with the book, with reading, both at home and in school, happened in German first, then quickly, a year later, in French, so that, & I realized this only much much later, I never read what I spoke.

Then, in high school, Latin & English & Spanish were added, & for some reason still unexplainable to me, I had an immediate sense of kinship with English. I wrote my way through that confusion, from 14 years on, first in German, then in French, even though the very first poems I wrote were written—I discovered this years later, when on returning to Luxembourg I found some old diaries—the first poems at age fourteen were written, strangely enough in English, on my first visit to England where I had fallen in love with an English girl.

And that fact was in a way a clue for me, when later I came to have to justify, or least to have to explain my decision to write in English, usually in front of an interlocutor who, sympathetic to my work or not, would most bring up the old chestnut of the impossibility of writing poetry in any other language than the "mother-tongue." Irritated, I would say why does one have to write in the papa-mama, the mummy/daddy language, why should that oedipal choice be the only possible or legitimate one, why should it not be my own sexual choice, that moment of one's discovery of the other, that moment when it is our sex that speaks and not that of our progenitors. So now the mother-tongue will have lost the m and have become the other tongue but that other will also now lose its hairy, unpronounceable, "the" & gain a lamda & a little victory-sign and become the lover's-tongue. As if the vowels somehow stood steadfast while the consonants, like my continents, kept on drifting. The lover's tongue then.

But that too, as explanation, seems too pat. The transformation of mother-tongue into lover's-tongue cannot really erase the other, that in-

between term of the equation. In-between. I was indeed born between languages, and it is more & more this sense of between-ness that interests me, & that I want to inhabit. Which of course lets the other back in, though this time maybe no longer as the abstract term of a dual on/off opposition, but as something richer, smellier, crazier. When I began shifting my focus from the question of the languages I spoke or learned to write in school, to what my own first engagements with the act of writing per se had been, way before the lover relationship came in, that is way before the poem had found or even wanted an addressee, before writing was functionalized in the way the world is wont to do to us as we are led to enter it after childhood, when it was still pure, free, playful expenditure, joyful waste, crayons on the wallpaper of the nursery, I came upon yet another language I had been writing in. I had learned to read very early on, at 4 or 5 & instantly been hooked—even as I am today. Like every kid of that generation in a German-speaking area, among the first books shoved at me were Karl May's Reise Erzahlungen. Adventure stories. Set in the Wild West, in the Orient, the Balkans, Siberia, wherever. And to get the local color & show off his hero's wide learning, these tales were liberally sprinkled with sentences & sentence fragments in Arabic, Mescalero Apache, Sioux, Persian, Chinese—or at least in what May tried to pass off as such. And it was this totally heterogenous language-matter that fascinated me most, much more than the so-called adventures or than the even for a young boy transparently hypocritical colonialist-Christian schlock morality that pervaded those books: I remember how, in my grandparent's farm house, using huge ancient-looking & -smelling hardbound cattle-registers, & those old red-on-one-end, blue-on-the-other-end pencils & copying out all of those sentences, plus May's translations, or what passed as such, & trying to make up my own—secret—language out of all those shards. My name became N-Tschoschi, Ni-Kunta, Tatanka Yotanka, Winnetou.

I have come back recently to this matter, this language mater, matrix, the dura mater brain skin of my word-world, and am trying to write a work called Winnetou Old, named after the most Mayan of heroes, the fictitious Mescalero Apache chief Winnetou. At some point in this work there is a breakdown, or meltdown, where the playing & punning gets down to the most basic sound-levels & values of my language(s) as in this excerpt, which centers not on the absent "hamsa" but on the very present but altered alpha, first letter of all our alphabets:

yourappian Kulcher hang the big O
l'outre l'autre now becomes au-tonomia another
alphabeta
begins towards mania l'altera ô becomes au begins

towards dawn drawn with your fingers in
shellacked
snows
of old we have learned nothing from millennia your defense the great meltdown domination domination of the planets Uranus hello Mario Tronti Tony Negri Sergio Bologna Franco Piperno Oreste Scalzone hello & good-bye
you too the night of Europe the workers no longer the edge will lift the whole construaimo una vita no longer the definite article

it is now a a aaaaa many aaaaaaaaaas construaimo u-naaaaa I love to build on declensions out of the east where the sun has entered the ass of the bone monkey the squatting monkey hands out its asshairs a rectum swallows it all back up ur-mouth ur-fear sun-eater Schreber Herr Doktor father father father tetanos bone monkey bone-setter stammers here your small sun unlanguaged sandwich between four a word a corpse from memory come back can I come back poling me mori I die cast myself a corpse ex changes color color rubor dolor

There you have it, briefly, the summa of my own confusions re language, or the one your write in versus all the other ones. The missing letter that give me over to the other language. I could have come at this from a different angle all together. For example, by maintaining—something I have often done—that all languages are foreign, that, as Robert Kelly once put it, language already is a second language. Or again, that one always writes in a foreign language, that poetry is a foreign language no matter what language one writes it in. & I could & do at times claim that I am not writing in a foreign language at all. I am still stuck in one basic current version of IndoEuropean, i.e., I function inside a euro-centric universe in which—if looked at from the outside—the similarities & samenesses are much more glaring than the differences we or I am making so much of right now.

NATHANIEL MACKEY

FROM SONG OF THE ANDOUMBOULOU

SONG OF THE ANDOUMBOULOU: 23

—rail band—

Another cut was on
the box as we pulled
in. Fall back though we
did once it ended,
"Wings
of a Dove" sung so
sweetly we flew. . .
The Station Hotel came
into view. We were in
Bamako. The same scene
glimpsed again and
again said to be a
sign. . .
As of a life sought
beyond the letter,
preached of among those
who knew nothing but,
at yet
another "Not yet" Cerno
Bokar came aboard, the
elevens and the twelves locked
in jihad at each other's
throats, bracketed light
lately revealed, otherwise
out. . .

Eleven men covered with
mud he said he saw. A
pond filled with water
white as milk. Three chanting
clouds that were crowds of
winged men and behind the
third
a veiled rider, Shaykh
Hamallah. . .

For this put under house arrest
the atavistic band at the
station reminded us, mediumistic
squall we'd have maybe made
good on
had the rails we rode been
Ogun's. . .
Souls in motion, conducive
to motion, too loosely
connected to be called a
band, yet "if souls converse"
vowed results from a dusty
record
ages old

•

Toothed chorus. Tight-jawed
singer. . . Sophic strain,
strewn voice, sophic stretch. . .
Cerno Bokar came aboard,
called
war the male ruse,
muttered
it under his breath, made sure
all within
earshot heard. . .
Not that the
hoarse Nyamukala flutes were

not enough, not that enough
meant something exact
anymore. . .
Bled by the effort but sang
even so, Keita's voice,
Kante's
voice, boast and belittlement
tossed back and forth. . .
Gassire's
lute was Djelimady Tounkara's
guitar,
Soundiata, Soumugoro, at each other's
throat. . . Tenuous Kin we called
our would-be band, Atthic Ensemble,
run
with as if it was a mistake we made
good on, gone soon as we'd
gotten
there

•

Neither having gone nor not having
gone, hovered, book, if it
was a
book, thought wicked with wing-stir,
imminent sting. . .It was the book
of having once been there we
thumbed, all wish to go back
let go, the what-sayer,
farther
north, insisting a story lay
behind the story he complained he
couldn't begin to infer. . .
What
made him think there was one
we wondered, albeit our what
almost immediately dissolved as we
came

to a tunnel, the train we took
ourselves to be on gone up in
smoke, people ever about to get
ready, unready, run between what,
not-what.
And were there one its name was
Ever After, a story not behind but in
front of where this was, obstinate
"were," were obstinate so susceptible,
thin
etic itch, inextricable
demur

•

Beginningless book thought to've
unrolled endlessly, more scroll
than book, talismanic strum.
As if all want were in his holding
a note only a half-beat
longer,
another he was now calling love
a big rope, sing less what
he did than sihg, anagrammic sigh,
from *war the male ruse* to *"were" the*
new ruse, the what-sayer,
sophic
stir. . .Sophic slide of a cloud across
tangency, torque, no book of a
wished else the where
we
thumbed

SONG OF THE ANDOUMBOULOU: 24

Had gotten off the bus to
pee in a field on the side
of the road, the women
farther
in than the men, the low
hems of their dresses held
up, hips all but touching
the ground. . .
So it was
I took it they meant low
squat, loquat was code.
Something, heads tilted
birdlike,
we heard, beaks what before
had been lips. The world's
raw want, could it all have
been so compressed. . .
Land
late of one whom love set
wandering. . .
Thin peninsular reef, abstract
earth. . .
Took between his lips her
cusp of tongue's foretaste
of "heaven," ravenous
word they
heard urging them on, loquat
spin. Teeth broke biting
her lip, intoxicant meat he'd
been
warned against, took between
his teeth. . .Took between
his own her bleeding lip's
lost
lustre, ravenous
word

taken back, bitten into,
burst. . .

Whereupon the what-sayer
stepped
in and said something,
what plot there was one of
stepping on, stepping
off,
entrances more than
remembered, exits, djinns
making off with what where
we had
left, the slow toll it
took,
low grumbling of drums. . .
What we they exacted spread as
myth insisted, so that we for
whom the word was long dead
said so
be it, that on such-and-such a
day So-and-so woke up to
a new
life, rid of wish, moot
would-it-were-so, moot
remorse,
out no less a part of it
than in, in and out,
such the one place they
might meet,
mute School-of-What-Hurts
her
husk of a voice
revive
them in

•

Push come to shove she'd
be with him he thought,
push came to shove.
Raz was the city in
ruins
they ran away from,
legs bent ready to
spring, hellbent on
heaven,
lit between themselves a
star.
Rubbed, made war on
"were," stayed within,
caught in a flame she'd
have warned was coming,
The low wrath of Dadaoua
painted on a wall,
thin
scribbling thick with
what depth he read into it,
sat
sipping hemlock it seemed. . .

Another beating. Business-as-
usual.
Chapter 8,281,404. . .
A tale
too inane to be told, she'd
say, "say" so unequal
to the task she'd sing, a
sound so to the side of enoughness,
a night in Tunisia, a
chicken
with lips. . .

Had it been
he she advised he'd have
ignored it. That it
was something he'd overheard

hit home. . .Irritant
"say" so abrasive its rasp
took up
asking what but an unintended
sign would get it said. . .
This
in a place named No-Such-Place,
burred
speech of a ghost named
Not-All-There

Asked had he been hit he
answered yes. Ouab'da he
called it as if it was a
place, made-up name he
made mean "beat with clubs,
kicked,"
what as-if there was long
since fallen away. It was
a place brought boots
to the ribs, batons to the
back. . .
Ouab'da he called it, said it
was a place, knew, if not already,
he'd be hit. . .
Split lift,
sat ravished, over-
taken, overwhelmed. . .
Ouab'da
he named it, said it was a
place,
never to go back
there again

SONG OF THE ANDOUMBOULOU: 25

—"zar" nth part—

Throughout it all a buzzing
drum at our backs. Again
it was a train we were on.
Outside the window came a sign
read "Ouar," we scratched our
heads.
No such place on the schedule we
read, no such where. . .Why no
"Not yet" yelled now we shouted
out, doubting what good it
would do. . .
Saw Ouagadou, sought Ouadada. No
point protesting warned a mouth
made of catfish teeth. . .
Chanted
Where is your love, chanted *Run,*
come, rally, chanted *What, blood,*
put it in place, pull it
apart,
chanted *Chant down Babylon*. . .
On its rise we the dismembered
winced. Inasmuch as what we want
was unreal there it stood, "four
times fallen asleep" not even
close,
came to where they'd always been.
Bombed
origins, splendorless, war their
one resolve. Reich without end its
aim, omnibus hitlist. . .
Hurtless.
Unctuous.
Oiled. . .

Tarred birds' wings. End-of-the-
world augury, new world omen. . .
First blood sweet to the tongue,
bitter going down. Tenuous. Ouagadou D.C.
Mothered in blood, on blood
gotten
big beyond limit. Said of its
demise we welcomed it, whispering
limit's will be done
even so. . .
Heard
my head say cradle me, myself cradle
my head. Wondered whose head I meant,
what voice I spoke with, volitionless,
feet
stuck to the floor. . .

A balloon tore
loose, floated off, I called it
back. . .B'Head looked in from
on high. . .
Said a bomb fell on its foot, said
B'Dot, said killing floor. Better
to be somewhere else we thought,
called
elsewhere Mozambique, Might've-Been. . .
B'Legless.
Last resort. . .
Adamant muses in lewd
array, thin trumpeter's lips against
the mouthpiece pressed against angular
exit, glimpse of a ghost, gaze a
ghost
would give, hushed if not harbored,
hummed. . .

Was it a place we wondered, my head spun,
bodiless, hit by nobody knew what. . .
Beneath crosshairs hoisted in green

light, earth of Hurqalya, obstinate,
caught. . . Genetic letter, inaccessible
alphabet. . .
Begged of the moment be my Imam. . .
Lost cause the lore you lament he
announced, said of the Udhrite
school
soy la ley, said say tonu soy. . .

Was it a place we wondered, balloonless,
bewildered. Hollow be my name I grumped. . .
Arab strings made us neigh like
horses. Atavist run, pa'l monte,
mounted, adamant heads made of
heartbreak
brass

FERNANDO CASTRO

THE VANISHING NAVEL OF THE WORLD: AN ILLUSTRATED STORY SELDOM SEEN OR TOLD

I. The historical backdrop

At the end of the nineteenth century, Peru, like many other Latin American countries, sought to establish itself in the community of modern nations. After bankruptcy (1876), an ignominious defeat in the War of the Pacific against Chile (1879-1883), and the political turmoil that followed it, the country attained around 1900 a certain degree of financial solvency. Being predominantly an agrarian country, political power was held directly or indirectly by landowners who ruled ruthlessly over impoverished Indians and mestizos. Indian rebellions to this unjust state of affairs, like the 1885 uprising of Atusparia, continued unabated well into the 1920s. This period from about 1890 to 1919—which the Peruvian historian, Jorge Basadre, has appropriately called the "Aristocratic Republic"—and the eleven-year period of the regime of Augusto B. Leguía that followed it, constitute the temporal frame of the photography discussed in part two of this essay.

The Andean cities of Arequipa, Cuzco and Puno in southern Peru were the vertexes of a cultural, political, and economic triangle during this time. They enjoyed relative independence from the central government of Lima and, except for Arequipa, their population was mostly Indian. Indeed, Peru was predominantly an Indian country and that fact came to be regarded both positively and negatively by members of the political and intellectual elites. Some regarded the Indian as an unredeemable savage who stood in the way of progress and modernization; others, saw him as a noble savage whose telluric ties to the land made him the foundation of a modern Peruvian nation. Curiously, both friends and foes of the Indian cause referred to the situation of the Indian as the "Indian problem."

Qosqo, as the city of Cuzco has been recently renamed, is the quechua word for "navel" or "center." It was the capital of the Tahuantinsuyo or Inca Empire. But at the turn of the century the city was overridden with filth and infestation. Throughout the century, it had lost 65% of its population to recurrent epidemics of typhoid, hepatitis and smallpox. Culturally and

economically the city had reached its nadir. But even as it did so, its new ascent had begun. In 1893 the *Centro Científico del Cuzco* was established in order to study the geography and hydrography of the region. New roads were built and in 1908 the railroad finally connected Cuzco to the Pacific Ocean. The following year, shots were fired at the University San Antonio de Abad. People thought the students were fighting over the only three women attending the university at that time. In fact, their revolt was a result of their unanswered demands for reforming the curriculum. The university was closed and the following year, president Leguía named Cornell professor of statistics and economics, Albert Anthony Giesecke (1883-1968), president of San Antonio de Abad.

At first, Giesecke was regarded with suspicion by the students who had revolted only a year earlier. After all, not only was the new president not a *cusqueño*, but he was a *gringo*. Nevertheless, Giesecke's casual, pragmatic style changed the philosophy of learning and research in San Antonio de Abad and gained him the sympathy of students who were later to become part of the *indigenista* intelligentsia. Under Giesecke's "reign of tennis" which lasted until 1923, a true Copernican revolution took place where instead of simply assimilating European knowledge, students were encouraged to learn about their own history and society. Thus, during the decade of the Mexican Revolution, World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution, the research theses produced in that university were predominantly about regional matters. In a sense, the events at San Antonio de Abad anticipated the *Movimiento de la Reforma Universitaria* whose official birth occurred in Argentina in 1919. The idea that a university is not an island of learning but an intellectual avant-garde leading the struggle for social reform, has left a deep mark in Latin American history ever since.

Another event contributed to make Cuzco the center of gravity in Peru once again. In 1911 Hiram Bingham led the Yale University and National Geographic Society expedition that serendipitously discovered Machu Picchu. This archaeological finding satisfied for different reasons at least three groups of people: the international consumer of exotica, the *indigenistas*, and modernizing nationalists. The latter saw in this finding something comparable to the European monuments that had become the basic ingredients of national histories. Machu Picchu and the Inca Empire became the analogues of the Coliseum and the Roman Empire. Not surprisingly, in the luxurious books that the Leguía regime published for the 1921 centennial of Peruvian independence, the writers boast of Peru's Inca past and treasures.

What was Peruvian *indigenismo?* As many a social scientist has pointed out, the force behind *indigenismo* did not come from those enlightened and well-meaning intellectuals who are properly called *indigenistas*, nor

from the half-hearted attempts of President Augusto Leguía's regime to deal with *el problema del indio*, but from the Indian insurrections that occurred during this time. These rebellions were a reaction to the abuses inflicted upon the Indians by the landowning whites and *mestizos*. Usurpation of Indian lands, excessive and unjustified taxation, forced labor, torture and killings, were all grievances against the feudal system of land tenure called *gamonalismo* (*gamonal* meaning "landowner").

An interesting case took place in 1901 when Indian delegates of the district of Santa Rosa (Puno) arrived in Lima to present their grievances to the central government. An investigative commission headed by the highly respected Alejandrino Maguiña went to Puno to find out the facts. It determined that three Indian political organizers had been traveling the countryside inciting Indians to fight for their civil rights and freedom of commerce. The latter may seem rather curious were it not for the fact that behind the aggression of the *gamonales* at this time was the high profits yielded by the wool trade. Indians wanted to sell their production freely according to the rules of an open market. In contrast, the *gamonales* coerced Indian producers to sell to them so that they could in turn profit by selling to the export firms of Arequipa.

During *El Oncenio*, the eleven-year "modernizing dictatorship" of President Leguía, he demagogically attempted to provide the Indians with some protection against abuse by the *gamonales*. Leguía's aim was to weaken his enemies of the *Civilista* party, supported by the *gamonales*. In 1920, Leguía endorsed the creation of the *Comité Pro-Derecho Indígena Tahuantinsuyo* to mediate between Indians and *gamonales*. But as the *Comité* became more sympathetic to the plight of Indians, organized congresses where the Indians represented themselves for the first time and rallied the support of known radicals like Hildebrando Castro-Pozo, José Carlos Mariátegui and Pedro Zulén, Leguía substituted it with the more innocuous *Patronato de la Raza Indígena*. Yet even the latter, played an important role on behalf of Indian rights. In Cuzco, the *Patronato* was presided over by Bishop Pedro Farfán, who is represented in the painting inside the self-portrait of Juan Manuel Figueroa-Aznar.

Hence, one face of *indigenismo* starts as a grass-roots movement and develops into a civil rights movement on behalf of the Indian population of Peru. But there is also an intellectual *indigenismo* and an *indigenismo* of literature and the arts. Professor Eugenio Chang-Rodríguez traces intellectual *indigenismo* back to the writings of anarchist poet and thinker Manuel Gonzáles Prada. In Cuzco, Gonzáles Prada had many followers, including Luis Velasco Aragón—who appears in one of the Chambi photographs addressing what is said to be a butcher's union. On account of his long hair and wide-brimmed hat they called him "el cowboy" and his

diatribe *La Verdad en el Fango* (the muddied truth) gained him public acclaim and political persecution. *Cusqueño indigenistas* like Uriel García and Luis Valcárcel became very influential in the intellectual life of Peru of the 1920s.

The term *indigenismo* in pictorial arts was first used to describe José Sabogal's paintings of Indians. In its first occurrences, it was a pejorative term, as much as "impressionism" once was. The subject matter of Sabogal offended bourgeois and oligarchic taste because, by and large, the Peruvian ruling classes aspired to live with the accoutrements of European culture and not with the local reminders of their own reality. Despite the calamities of post-independence Peruvian history the ruling class did not forget that Lima had been one of the two main Spanish viceroyalties; a fact which translated into a life of wealth, leisure and culture for some largely based on the exploitation of the Indian. The paintings of Sabogal were called *pintura de lo feo* (painting of ugliness) by the defenders of "good taste" because they did not conform to European canons of beauty and because they exalted the Indian.

Sabogal visited Cuzco in 1919—on his return to Peru from Europe and Argentina—and he suffered an epiphany of sorts in the rarefied *cusqueño* atmosphere. A year before him, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, who was to become the founder of the radical *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana* party, had been in Cuzco also. His contact with the *cusqueño indigenistas* eventually gave rise to his panamericanism and indo-americanism. *Cusqueño indigenismo* also influenced Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui. Upon Sabogal's insistence, Mariátegui opted to name "Amauta" the avant-garde magazine which he first thought to name "Vanguardia" ("Amauta" is quechua for "teacher"). Indeed, Mariátegui embraced *indigenismo* and imbued it with Marxist ideology.

Cuzco's rebirth was not only intellectual but also entrepreneurial. Without any help from the government the wealthy families of Cuzco (later photographed by Martín Chambi) like the Lomellinis and the Montes, financed a hydroelectric power plant that brought electricity to Cuzco in 1914. The availability of electricity allowed the textile and beer industries to expand.

In the meantime, in the 1920s president Leguía increased the power of the central government and deprived the provinces of government assistance. Intent on breaking the power of the *gamonales* whose territory included Arequipa, Cuzco and Puno, Leguía consciously neglected the region. Meanwhile, in Lima he commemorated the 1921 centennial of Peruvian independence with lavish celebrations that made the roaring twenties one masquerade party after another. Having lived in England, Leguía spoke English with a British accent and many would have made him

king as he welcomed foreign dignitaries, aristocrats and noblemen. Different countries presented Peru with gifts on its anniversary. The value of the gift was usually proportional to their share in the Peruvian economy. Italy's gift was the beautiful oval building which is still occasionally called *Museo Italiano;* Japan's was a monument to Manco Capac, legendary founder of the Inca Empire; and the United States' was the rather modest but beautiful trio of nudes holding a fountain. The latter was placed in the newly inaugurated *Avenida Leguía* (which changed its name to "Arequipa" after the downfall of Leguía).

Of course, all of this presupposed a certain level of material welfare. World War I had a positive effect upon the Peruvian economy and in 1920 export revenues soared to unprecedented peaks. Up until this time, most of those revenues found their way back into Peru. But as foreign investment in the extractive mining sector increased, capital fled elsewhere. Yet Leguía continued to expand the size of the central government as if revenues were still increasing. His plans for modernization were helped along by the fact that credit turned amicably to Latin America during that time. Eventually, it was precisely Arequipa, Puno and Cuzco that conspired to oust Leguía, but for the duration of the *oncenio*, they agonized economically and socially.

II. The photographers

By the end of the nineteenth century the fascination for distant, picturesque and exotic worlds had become widespread. The more adventuresome romantics, like Paul Gauguin sailed off in search of primitive paradises; whereas the sedentary collectors gathered photographic postcards from faraway landscapes, peoples, and architecture. Photographers from all over the world joined the lucrative market that filled the albums of well-to-do families with views of Japanese samurai, bare-breasted African natives, Egyptian pyramids, and vestiges of ancient civilizations.

In the highlands of Peru, **Miguel Chani** (1865-1951) was partially motivated by that market. His images of Indian natives next to pre-Columbian sites combine two sought-after collectibles: the exotic native and ancient architecture. Chani, about whom little is known, must have been a very prosperous photographer for he owned studios in Arequipa, Cuzco and Puno. His relatively few surviving negatives suggest that, although he was primarily a nineteenth century studio photographer, he managed to free himself from many of the strict portrait conventions of his century. Moreover, one of his portraits shows a non-Indian woman dressed

as an Indian with a backdrop of Sacsahuaman, the Inca fortress that oversees Cuzco.

If the date of that image is circa 1900, then Chani is not only one of the first artists to give evidence of the changing attitudes regarding Indian culture, but also one of its first activists among image-makers. The Inca motif of that studio backdrop is rare even among later photographers whose backdrops usually show European castles, romantic classic columns and the like.

The most eccentric and flamboyant of the Cuzco photographers was **Juan Manuel Figueroa-Aznar** (1878-1951): actor, painter, photographer. Although, not a *cusqueño* himself, Figueroa-Aznar found his way into the hearts of the Cuzco society through his bohemian ways—a trait which *cusqueños* apparently found so endearing that he managed to marry into one of the city's most important families. He married the niece of Archbishop Benigno Yábar. Figueroa-Aznar's work alternates between the solemnity of the cloister and the light-heartedness of the theatre. Through his ecclesiastical connection, Figueroa gained access to a very important clientele which included not only the wealthy, but also the clergy. *El Salón Azul* (the blue room) is a rare view of the private world of a rich clergyman. The spectator is overwhelmed by the iconographic opulence of the room. The light invading the room shines on the pictures and their idolaters as if to sanctify their cult of images. In the equestrian portrait of his beautiful wife, Ubaldina Yábar, she is presented as a romantic heroine. However, the unfailing presence of an Indian servant in a dark corner of the typical courtyard of a Cuzco house brings one back to earth.

It is not clear what led Figueroa to *indigenista* themes. His first exhibits ranged over a varied subject matter in which the Indian did not figure. Due to his involvement in local theatre, he often portrays himself not as himself but as a troubadour, monk or other amusing personae. His sequence of himself as a spurned bohemian augurs well for the school of cinematography which later developed in Cuzco. Given the many pictures he took of histrionic scenes, we venture to guess that his *indigenista* faith matured on the boards. The first evidence of that conversion is from his 1916 exhibit and that date coincides with the beginnings of theatre revival in Cuzco. Theatre with Indian themes had gone underground since the late XVIII century when Viceroy Toledo forbade Ollantay—which was allegedly performed for the most famous of all Indian rebels: Tupac Amaru II. Or, Figueroa-Aznar may have continued the work of Chani in a slightly different vein. After all, the studio at Calle Márquez #67 which he occupied, first belonged to Chani and later belonged to Chambi. Some scholars suspect that what today is Chambi's archive may very well contain images of these photographers who were in Cuzco before him.

It has been suggested that Figueroa's *indigenismo* ran parallel to the intellectual developments at the Universidad San Antonio de Abad under Giesecke; that it deepened as he spent time in the Yábar's hacienda of Paucartambo in the eastern slope of the Andes and that it was potentiated by the discovery of Machu Picchu in 1911. Whatever the case may be, by the time Chambi arrived in Cuzco and shared his studio, Figueroa had already rehearsed an *indigenista* script that Chambi would later perform perhaps with more authenticity because in spite of his dandyism, the latter was virtually indistinguishable from his Indian subjects.

The year 1920—when **Martín Chambi** (1891-1973) allegedly arrived in Cuzco—was blessed by an all-time peak in Peru's export revenues. The war which had devastated Europe had brought prosperity to the textile, rubber and mining industries. Nevertheless, that year also marked the slow decline of Cuzco, Puno and Arequipa. The lure of modern life, however, with its conveniences and its promise of social mobility, was enthusiastically endorsed by radicals and conservatives, by Caucasians, mestizos and Indians, by rich and poor. Most importantly, it was fully endorsed by the *indigenistas.* It is this endorsement that is most important in understanding that movement and its effect on Chambi. An *indigenismo* without modernity is merely picturesque; a merely picturesque *indigenismo* as an explanation for Chambi's most important work leaves most of it unaccounted for. Chambi did indulge in picturesque, pictorialistic images in the exhibitions which he curated himself. Only his "rediscovered" work features the more modern images that are also the most compelling. Although that issue deserves further attention, here we will simply grant full rights to all of his images: those he showed, those he published, those he was commissioned to do and those whose motivations research will hopefully clarify.

How close was Chambi's association with the *indigenistas?* Two instances are worth mentioning. The first is his personal friendship with Roberto Latorre, owner of the most important *indigenista* avant-garde magazine of Cuzco called *Kosko* (1924-1925). Chambi supported this magazine by buying announcements for his studio *Arte Fotográfico M. J. Chambi.* It was risky business to do so because of the magazine's communist links and its proximity to members of the *Logia Federalista* movement—bitterly opposed to the Leguía regime. *Kosko* gathered together the best minds of *indigenismo:* Uriel García, Luis Valcárcel, Gamaliel Churata and others. Chambi's second important connection to *indigenismo* is precisely with Gamaliel Churata. According to the now deceased Manuel Chambi, Martín's son, Churata was a friend and frequent guest at their household. The friendship which may have developed between Chambi and Churata may be largely based on the fact that Churata was a *paisano* from Puno and that of all the renowned *indigenistas,* Churata lived closer

to his principles. Proof of which is the fact that he married an Indian not being an Indian himself. Most other *indigenistas* were Indian in soul but not in kin. Chambi, although probably a *mestizo*, was in looks as close to being an Indian as they come

"Gamaliel Churata," Arturo Peralta's nom-de-plume for Churata was the Tristan Tzara of *indigenismo*. He adopted dadaism in his quest for authentic cultural expression. He published a very influential avant-garde magazine called *Boletín Titicaca*. In it he published the work of members of his literary group Orkopata and the Peruvian and Latin American literary avant-garde. He also reviewed European avant-garde magazines like *Der Sturm*. Churata's most famous work *El pez de oro* is coded in stream-of-consciousness automatic writing merging European aesthetic form with modernist *indigenista* themes. Though Chambi seems to have had a bright, intuitive mind, he was no intellectual; but it is still hard to believe that the magnetic, persuasive, almost messianic personality of Churata (Aymara word for "the enlightened one") could have had no effect on him. If he did in fact have an effect, much of Chambi's most modernistic images become clearer.

Chambi's portrait of his friend Mario Perez Yañez on a motorcycle with the blurred girl giving the sensation of speed (a favorite theme of the avant-garde) is well known. But the portrait of Chambi himself on the same motorcycle has only recently been published. The fact that the brand of these first motorcycles was *Indian* must have impressed the Indian population with the idea that modernity was destined for them, and vice versa. That image together with his self-portrait holding a negative, the bride on the stairway of the Montes house, the children playing cards and the recently found overview shot of a multitude of men with hats do not belong to the repertoire of *indigenismo*—in the narrow painterly sense. But it does belong to the modernist *indigenismo* of *Kosko* and *Boletín Titicaca*.

The visual similarities and systematic taxonomic project of Chambi to photograph the different ethnic groups of the region has led people to compare his work with that of German photographer August Sander. But the nightmarish and ironic approach in images like the *Gadea Wedding* and *Indians at a court of law* link Chambi's work to other artists connected to the New Objectivity like the expressionist painters Max Beckmann and Otto Dix.

Chambi's portrait of Velasco Astete and the shot of his airplane hovering over Cuzco is part of an epic story faithfully narrated in the pages of *Kosko*. Velasco Astete was the first *cusqueño* pilot who flew across the Andes in an Italian plane bought by the city of Cuzco and named after it. Man and machine incarnated *cusqueños'* dream of being in communication with the modern world. A 1925 cover of *Kosko* depicts Velasco Astete as one with his machine, as Spaniard conquistadores and their horses had

seemed as one to the eyes of the Indians. Velasco Astete became a hero of epic proportions, a winged angel in the midst of mortals aspiring to the elusive blessings of modernity. Almost completely blank except for the small silhouette of a small plane in the distant sky—was a cover of *Kosko* for the issue of a posthumous homage to Velasco Astete as he crashed, only weeks after his spectacular arrival in Cuzco. Chambi photographed his funeral which buried the dreams of *cusqueños* at a time when they most needed to have hopes. From then on, *cusqueños* redirected their energies and would join efforts with that sinister character, Luis Sánchez Cerro (also photographed by Chambi), to overthrow Leguía.

Many writers deny a strong flow of information from Europe and the U.S. to these photographers. To be sure, until we began work on the Vargas Bros. of Arequipa there was no smoking gun. But pictorialist connection has been fully confirmed with the existence of pictorialist literature at the Vargas library. Magazines such as *Foto* (Barcelona) and *Foto Magazine* (Buenos Aires)—of which the Vargas were official representatives—suggest the bold hypothesis that the aesthetics of *indigenismo* are not only rooted in 19th century *costumbrismo* but also in pictorialism. From Peter Henry Emerson to Missone, Puyo and Stieglitz definite and precise parallels can be drawn to account for at least the points of departure of most of the Peruvian photographers we have mentioned. Most importantly, many *indigenista* paintings can be arrived at from some of the pictorialist photographs in those magazines by way of a mental experiment where llamas are substituted for sheep and Indian peasants for European shepherds. There is no doubt that the Vargas Bros. fully assimilated the pictorialist creed. Fortunately for us, they wrote several articles about photography and its role in art. Some of these writings are part of a 1929 debate about the status of photography as art which they had with a poet who had written an adverse review of their show. When said poet challenged them to a photographic duel, they responded by choosing the arms not of film but of poetry: verse.

By 1921, **Carlos** (1885-1977) and **Miguel Vargas** (1886-1979) were widely acclaimed for their bromoil portraits and night photography. But a preliminary inspection of their archive shows their photographic interests to have a wider thematic range than any of their peers. The ingenuity which they show in their night photography spills over to every task they set themselves to. In a sense, their work is more removed from *indigenista* concerns. But the Vargas thread is as important to the image of the country than the work of the others. Peru is simply that kind of schizophrenic country; it is Indian and it is European, it is rural and cosmopolitan. There are indeed a few images in their work with *indigenista* overtones, but they are simply the exception that confirms the rule. They simply show how by

the late 1920s almost everybody was doing the Indian-thing. Social commentary is not in their photographic agenda, but what does seem to be is the expression of the *zeitgeist*—at least that of Arequipa. The fascination with nocturnes is shared by members of the *Aquelarre*, an iconoclastic group of literati with whom they had close contacts. Dandies and bohemians themselves, they had an unabashed penchant for novelty. Their gallery was an island of fascination for the curious wanderer and their devotion for their city echoes that of Sudek for Prague or Francesco Ferrucio Leiss for Venice. Just as Nadar was the first to show the work of impressionists in Paris, the Vargas Bros. were the first to show the work of *indigenista* painters in their gallery; they also showed the photographic work of Chambi and Figueroa-Aznar.

Their comfortable house and their high standing in *Arequipeño* society is an indication that the Vargas Bros. fared better than anybody else in the field. **Crisanto Cabrera**'s story (1904-1990), on the other hand, does not have a happy ending; his recent death in a miserly asylum was ignored by even his most immediate family. Cabrera started as a helper in Chambi's studio in his late teens. As soon as he saved enough money to have a camera he set up a darkroom in his brother's home and went to work seeking a clientele which could probably not afford a Chambi portrait. Thus, his work is important because he picks up where Chambi's ideological motivations and/or self-interest stop. His "touch" is every bit as masterly as his master's but bolder, more agile, and humorous. His image of a faked automobile accident light-heartedly anticipates the dangers of technological change.

It would not be surprising to find out that Cabrera played an important role in many of Chambi's masterly self-portraits. Shortly before he died, Crisanto would choreograph the inmates of the asylum and act as if he was going to take a picture. "I'm a great photographer," he would announce. But when his subjects laughed at his imaginary camera, he would complain that it had been stolen.

The twenties were also the decade when American capital consolidated its power in Peru especially in the mining and oil sector. Buying off its competitors, the Cerro de Pasco Copper Corporation become the single most important force in Peruvian economy and copper became the main export. But this extractive export did not rebound back into the national economy the way exports in years past had. Politicians and local capitalists, concerned with their short-term well-being, failed to see the long term implications of surrendering economic power to foreign capital. Thinkers like Mariátegui and Haya de la Torre raised objections to foreign penetration of capital; but not being economic agents themselves, their outcries had little or no effect. Moreover, their iconoclastic ideologies often blinded

them to the finer aspects of this penetration and the available options to counteract it.

In the central Andean highlands, artificial mining towns sprouted usually in quite inhospitable desolate areas. The job opportunities created for Peruvians were unhealthy, dangerous and badly paid. Would-be miners left their peasant communities deceived by *enganchadores* and by the lure of a modern job. In the photographs of **Sebastián Rodríguez** (1896-1968), miners proudly pose before the camera wearing the attire of their newly acquired status. Rodriguez was commissioned by the mining company to take ID mug shots of the miners; but in his modest studio Rodríguez also worked for the miners themselves who wished to send their folks back home an image of themselves. Sebastián's brother, Braulio, who possessed painterly talents, painted the backdrops for his studio. The Swiss chalet in many of the studio portraits was copied by Braulio from a box of Swiss candy.

This incongruity is as moving as it is comic, for in the dreams of these miners who usually worked to save money to improve their farms—an illusion that the *enganche* system would prevent from happening—mining was the way out of their misery. Instead they found their life and health slowly disintegrating in Morococha—"the many colored lake." By contrast, life inside the walls natives would never cross, American employees and their families enjoyed the comforts of modern living and country club leisure—golf course included. Rodríguez, who was trained by Luis Ugarte, one of the most prestigious photographers of Lima, did his commissioned work with a sense of mission that he carried over to his numerous photographic expeditions to the surrounding areas. Unfortunately, upon his death, most of his work was lost or destroyed. Most of the images which do exist were those meaningful to the history of the family; such as the one where the entire family poses in front of a hydroplane floating on the icy waters of Lake Morococha.

III. Conclusion

The literary and painterly *indigenismo*, like many art manifestations that follow political agendas, tended to be superficial. Instead of probing into the depths of the Indian person and his culture, *indigenismo* merely glorified them. Only later *indigenistas* like José María Arguedas successfully achieved depth. On the other hand, the more interesting and modern *indigenistas* like Gamaliel Churata have until recently received little or no recognition. Indeed, the modernist aspect of *indigenismo*, so conspicuous in this photography, has not been sufficiently explored in the literary and

painterly manifestations of the movement. The photographers of this time have also received little recognition. Although they engaged in the same project of reevaluation of autochthonous culture, they did not follow the *indigenista* recipes of glorification. Their creed, like that of Sander, was rather, a new objectivity.

In Peru, no museum includes in its collection a work by Chambi or the Vargas Brothers. The Museo de Arte de Lima has a collection of Sebastian Rodríguez's work only because it was donated to it; but it does not show any of it. Yet, it is the photographic work of these photographers that may prove to be the most enduring and penetrating artistic legacy of this period of Peruvian history.

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PERUVIAN PHOTOGRAPHERS FROM THE CUZCO REGION

SELF-PORTRAIT HOLDING A GLASS-NEGATIVE

Martín Chambi

INDIANS AT A COURT OF LAW

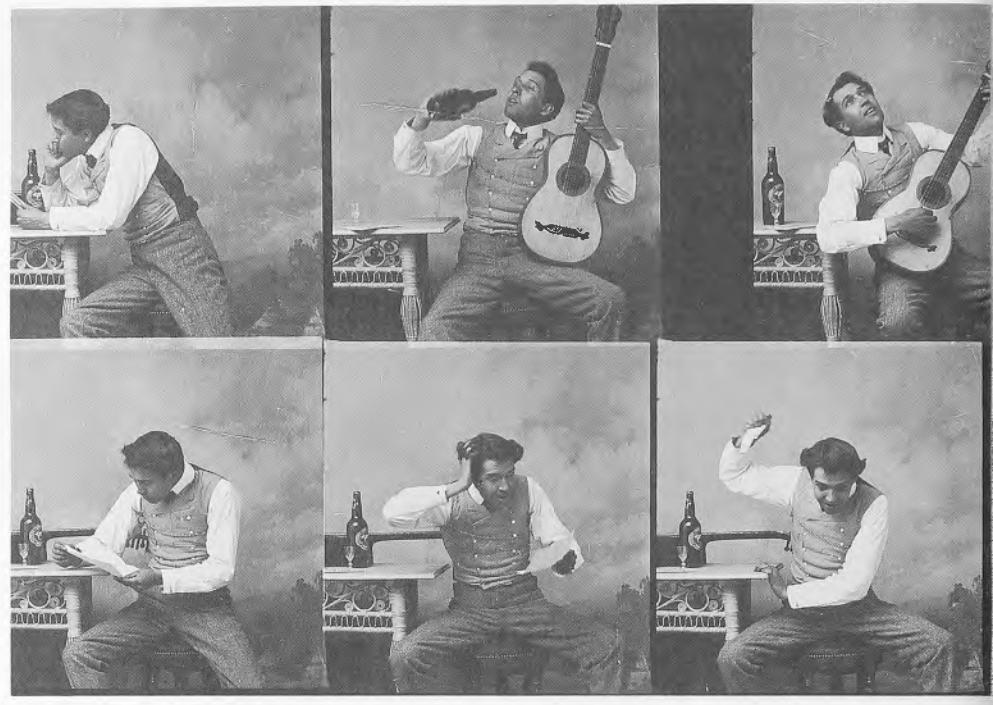
Martín Chambi

MUSICIANS

Martín Chambi
Cuzco, circa 1925

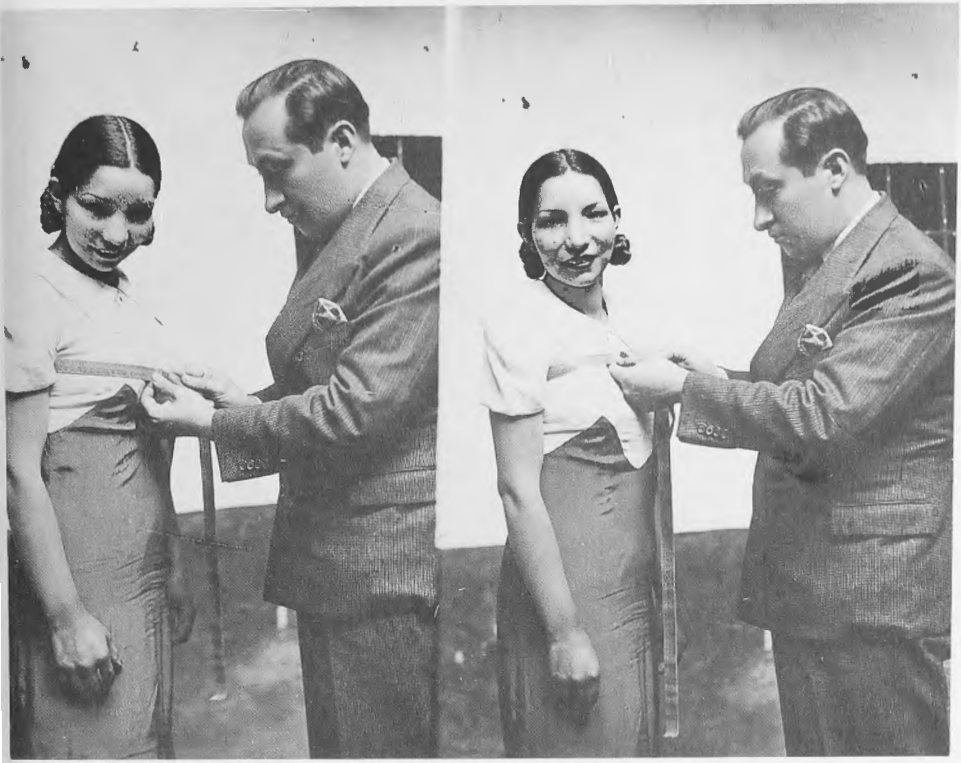
Q'ERO INDIAN

Juan Manuel Figueroa-Aznar
Cuzco, circa 1910



SELF-PORTRAIT AS SPURNED BOHEMIAN

Juan Manuel Figueroa-Aznar
Cuzco, circa 1910

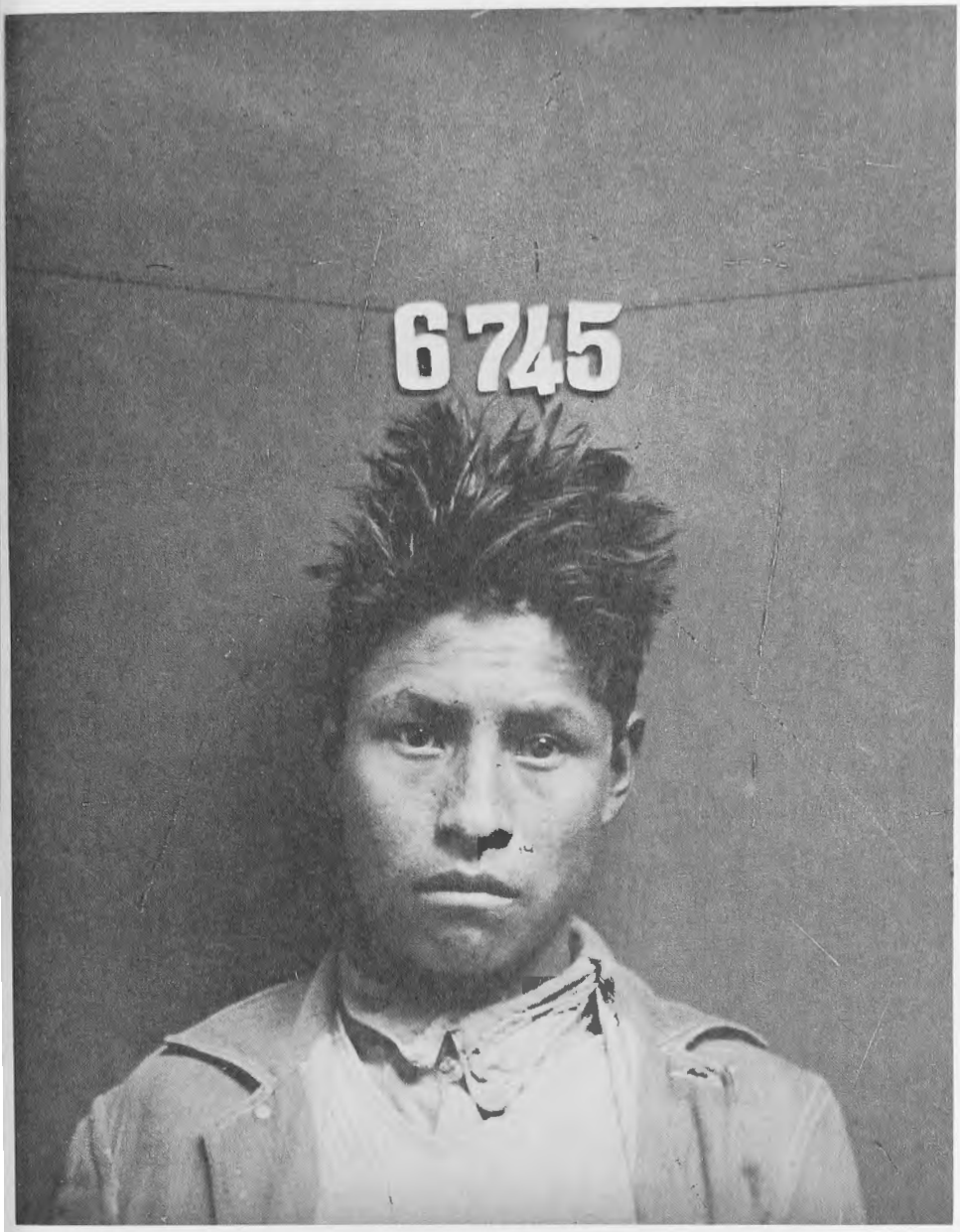


TAILOR TAKING MEASUREMENTS

Crisanto Cabrera
Cuzco, circa 1930

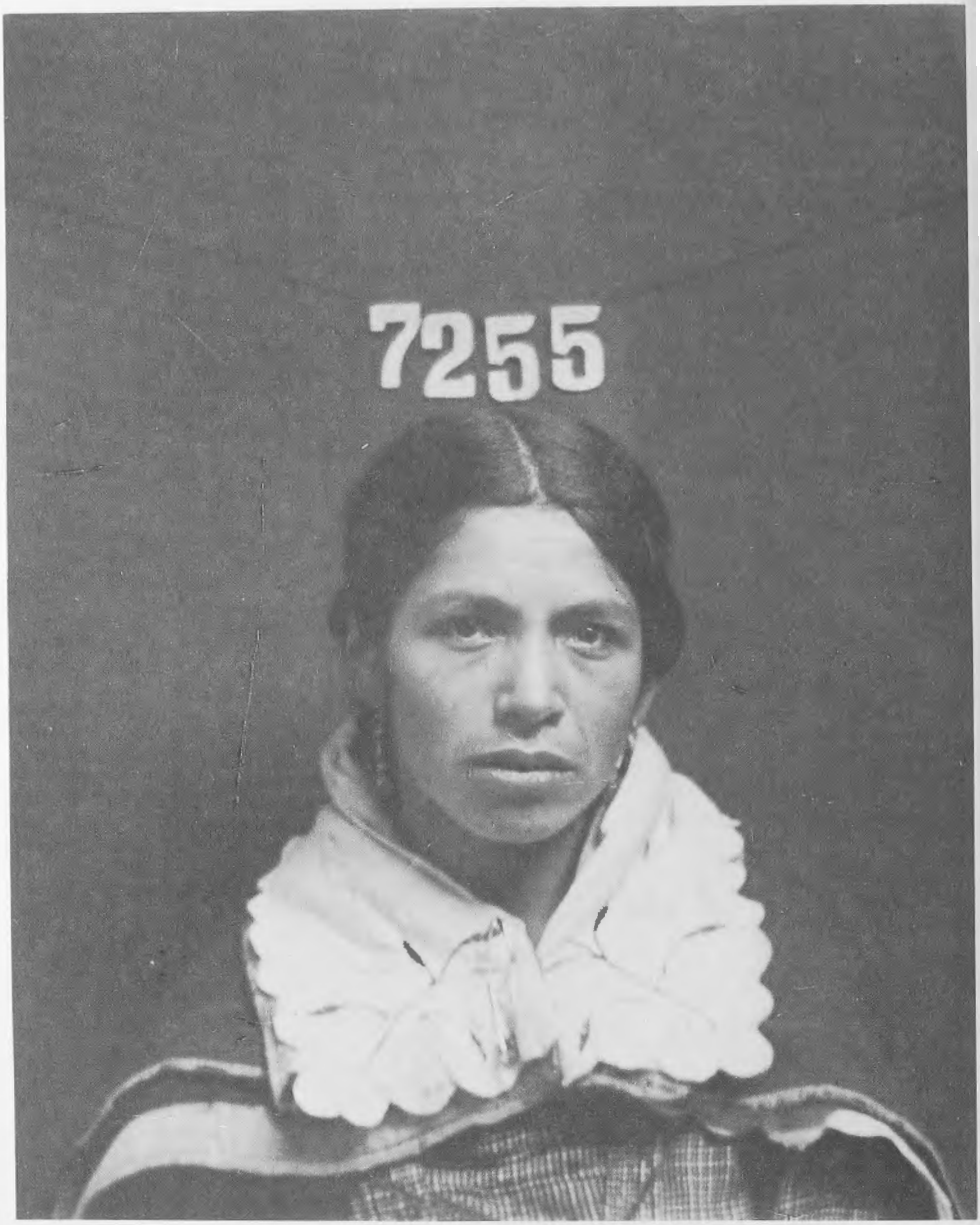
FAMILY WITH SHEEP

Crisanto Cabrera
Cuzco, circa 1925



MINER

Sebastián Rodríguez
Morococha, circa 1930



WOMAN MINER

Sebastián Rodríguez
Morococha, circa 1930

DANDY

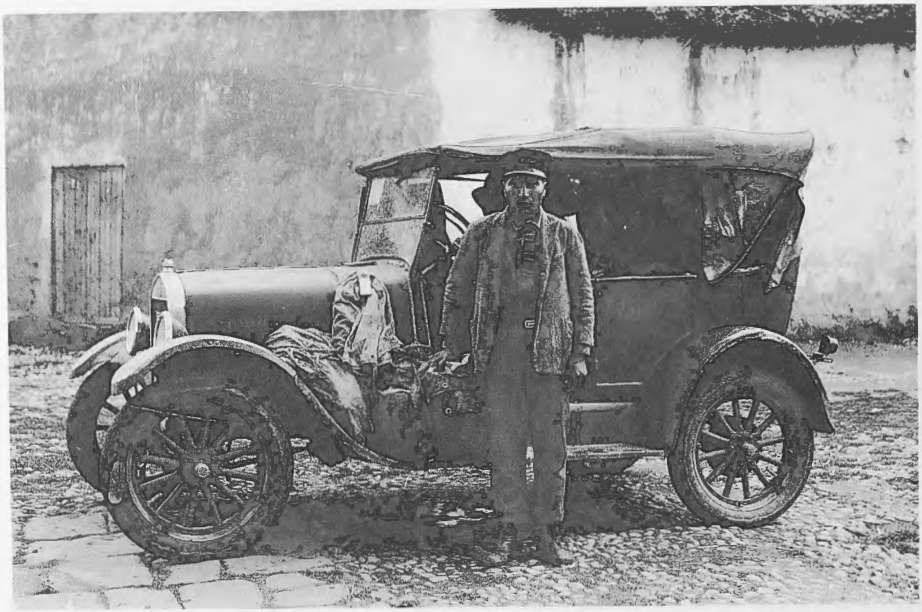
Crisanto Cabrera
Cuzco, circa 1925

MINERS IN THE STUDIO

Sebastián Rodríguez
Morococha, circa 1930

NEWLY-ARRIVED FAMILY

Sebastián Rodríguez
Morococha, circa 1930

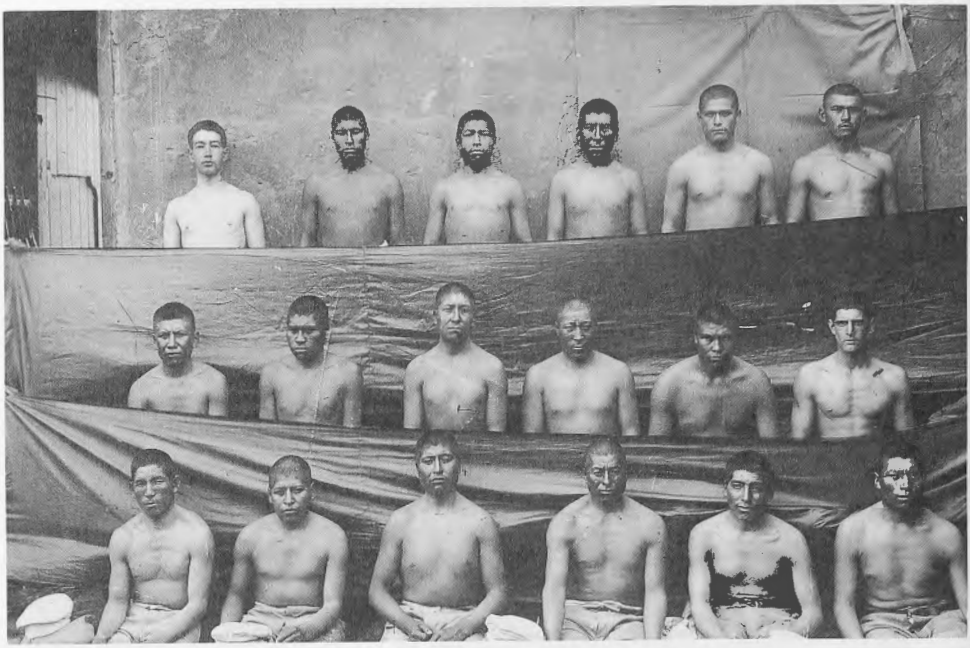


INDIAN CHAUFFEUR

Varga Hnos
Arequipa, circa 1920

INDIANS & MESTIZOS

Avelino Ochoa
Cuzco, circa 1930



SOLDIERS WITH SHAVED HEADS

Varga Hnos
Arequipa, circa 1920

VILLAGE SCHOOL

Avelino Ochoa
Cuzco, 1925

MESTIZA WITH INCA BACKDROP

Miguel Chani
Cuzco, crica 1910

HENRI MICHAUX

THE BEGINNINGS

(Tr. from the French
by James Wanless)

A

Given a piece of chalk to hold in his hand, a child will draw on the sheet of paper a disorderly array of encircling lines, some almost right over others.

Overflowing with vitality, he makes more of them, and more, endlessly.

. . . . . .

Around, around, whirling lines
of big, entangled, awkward
circles
immediately begun over
again, again
like spinning a top

Circles. Desires for circularity.
Precedence to turning

In the beginning is
REPETITION

Grasp
only circles encompass
encompass anything at all
everything
the known, the unknown as it passes
arrives, comes on
comes back

Lines circulating from the itch to enclose
(to comprise? to hold? to hold back?)

Finally, a tangle
a teeming thready tangle

. . . . . .

At this age the child experiences an unparalleled pleasure in everything that turns, nothing being more desirable than riding wooden horses that turn, rising and falling rhythmically, the age when hoops and balloons are almost magical.

Now, by himself, by his own powers. . .this miniature of man will make things go around, so that he can watch it happen, not lose track of it. But more than the lines themselves, the gesture matters, the act, the "doing" of circles.

In what period more than early childhood would one feel circularity, which is made by turning, and comprises starting out and returning.

Risk and joy of starting out. Then wanting to return.

The journey and the return, the circle, the shape of both flight and refuge (the child not yet being liberated from the dread of someday being lost, beyond the scope of his family and incapable of ever returning).

First and unconscious abstraction, the circle, and how vast, and how often and differently arising, life itself, the life in life.

Circle, the common wall between the external and the internal, the thinkable and the imaginable. And between the perceived and the retained, for everything that will perhaps require enclosing later.

And intoxication sets in, the most natural of them all, intoxication with repetition, the primary drug.

Return, return, return, on and on and on.

The perfect circles of draftsmen and geometers do not interest the child. The imperfect circles the child makes do not interest adults, who call them scribbling, not seeing the point, the outburst, the gesture, the reach, the discovery, the exaltation in reproducing incidents of circularity, by which an as yet inexperienced hand grows stronger.

A line stage, an array of strokes criss-crossing every which way, may also show up at first, delight in wild gestures.

One day, one day after many days, escaping from the bacchic round, one curving line will not make the usual complete turn: it slows down, is about to stop. Much to the child's surprise, this particular line says something, keeps him in suspense, makes him stop, and consider. . .

The linear mark left on the paper reminds him of someone, his mother, or his father,. . .why, it's a man, the man representative of all men, man himself.

Whether he closes it completely or incompletely, the curved shape the child now sees approaching from afar will attract him more and more. Man has been located once and for all. The child has gotten hold of it, and he will make use of it, great use. It's a sure thing.

Confident, immediately "believing"—a truly exalting believing—he gets ready to encounter these man-shapes again, to rediscover them in his lines, to make them come back again, summoning them time and again, more and more easily.

Already the head is important. Dominant, as big as and bigger than the body—nothing special there—the head (which, in fact, does already know how to perform many functions—eating, sucking, biting, seeing, hearing, tasting, drawing away, kissing, jabbering, crying, laughing, making faces, scaring people, making them angry, perhaps talking), in his drawings the head is the kingpin, sovereign over all other body parts.

At the very outset, a "head period" (surprising prophetic knowledge!). And simultaneously, to an embryologist an accurate picture: just as in all mammalian embryos, the head of the human embryo is incredibly large.

For the child, the head alone is indispensable.

A head comes across a head, while the feet—mere accompaniment—may be missing, and the knee and the neck and everything else that will appear later. For the time being, he doesn't go back over it. He's still too young for touching up.

In his drawings he does not copy man; the child "catches" him. Some likeness has been spotted, however awkwardly he might handle it. He has made an analogy. And on his way now, even with only this first step taken, transported with joy, the child has discovered an essential of many future mental processes.

The best welcome first. Simplicity.

Ill-formed, poorly made, bodies still without arms, and arms without joints, coming out of the neck, or anywhere at all, out of the head, the chest, sticks, brooms extending all the way across and through the envelope of the bust, arms for spreading out, expanding, for stretching oneself.

Hands off in the distance, still farther off, as far away as possible, stiff, outspread fingers, at the self's outer limits, fingers.

Pleasures he is discovering.

Surface without mass, a simple thread encompassing a void-being, a bodiless body.

Bag-man, that's all, that's enough, looking out through two holes up top. Big-head man.

A bag. Strange. Or is it? Did he not previously live, and for months—before taking a single breath outside—enveloped?

Asked to draw somebody, just anybody, the child often forgets legs, and arms, and that his own anatomy is designed for movement. It's as if he had not yet opted for mobility; at least he doesn't feel it is essential.

Tall, it's a father; not as tall, with packages, a mother, woman from before the sensuality of contours, before the ambiguous, rounded breasts.

Upright, a two-legged post; that's a man. Close by, another, but one-legged and quite round; that's a tree.

How proximate are men and trees! Men, almost trees, pretty much like anything at all, man!

House with watchful windows, a great face reached by a countryside path.

Road in front for greeting, like a wish to be welcome, road meant to soothe, reassurance at the outset, and the door always clearly indicated, the door. . .mustn't be left out, entryway to the protection of home. . .and the doorknob, often included even in his very first drawings, the useful and difficult doorknob.

The most imprecise approximations do not bother the child. What matters is the *bringing together.* Such comparing, he discovers over and over again, is an obvious way of opening a door, which will lead to the opening of others. Complicity's wide door.

It doesn't much matter that, to an adult eye, the man drawn by the child looks more like a bean pole, a giant tadpole, a clown, a fat sausage, or an enormous beet. In one line, the transmission takes place.

A man's body comes to him, a balloon-body, a stick-body, a disabled body but, to his mind, sufficiently a man's body, and much better, the nature of man, and still more amazing, sometimes it turns out to be the child himself. His own being—there it is again, he sees it in there. He gets himself

into this fragile envelope, then does it again. He feels it is "like" him, no difficulty comparing himself to it: a firm line, although variable according to mood, separates a vague inside from the outside.

Man, from now on rediscoverable at will. In these lines, now no longer explosive, the prodigy that makes him man. Start-man.

. . .while young chimpanzees or gorillas, who make near-circles that often equal children's, remain at that same point, in that same pleasure.

However many curved lines they might make, none of them ever recognizes in any line either a body or the shape of anyone or anything; they don't stop.

Perhaps they need only be clearly shown how to get on their way.

To draw is to represent, to present anew, thus to imitate. Odd that monkeys, such imitators, don't imitate in this way too.

Now the child, right from the first days of his discovery, knows his way around, deals with beings and things without having to see them right in his lines. He is not coming back.

He has seen the correspondence, which monkeys do not see, he has caught hold of it, resuscitates it, thereby achieving the human condition more fully than his ancestors in having discovered the wheel or even fire starting up from rubbing sticks together.

This bringing together, comparing, permanently engages him and becomes a vital practice, one in steadily increasing use.

Bodies of fathers, bodies of mothers, bodies of boys and girls, of babies and of cats and of dogs.

As for trees of three or four branches, or arms, that's all the touches he needs to get the whole thing down. . .sufficiently.

No rules yet, no compromises, no laws imposed, drawing that is allusive rather than descriptive.

. . .and playful.

Sometimes, to the scandal of everyone around, and with the gravest of expressions, the child will draw a goofy father and play with it disrespectfully, manipulating the personage however he pleases, in accordance with what surprises him, delights him. . .

Play created, or enhanced, by as yet unskillful gestures, an uncertain little hand creates it and sustains it.

One time close to the model, the next further off, happy either way, not trying to equal it, playing at being the father and not being the father while still being the father, in ridiculous approximations that amuse him.

Natural playing, if not innocent at least in fun, but not insistent, incidentally father, casually father. A father readily let go of, with his unpleasant head. . .big, more like elongated, interminable.

Houses come to him time and again. A certain unflagging burst of strokes makes straight lines and straight lines, naturally, make a house, close enough, with door, windows, and roof. No difficulty. Then the road is added, preferably sinuous, fun to make, so necessary, so eloquent, his passage, and also as the primary element in orientation—careful not to omit it.

In his drawings the child evokes the house, pictures how to get there, to return to it whenever he needs it, rehearses the pleasure of getting back to it, sets up his frames of reference.

B

When the child is provided (often too early) with crayons and jars of paint, after only a few experiments, an inundation spreads across his virgin sheet of paper, an unknown celebration, forerunner of many more. The schematic, investigative drawing he'd been practicing retrocedes.

Now color and its splendor. Soon everything will partake of its amplitude.

Spreading out, spreading out, pouring out, filling up, overflowing. Surfaces overrun, forms thickening. Texture, matter.

The earlier breakthrough into graphics, which is suitable for reporting, locating, pointing out, gives way to ENCHANTMENTS.

Besides, his drawings—whether of his father, his mother, or brothers—had never been pictures exactly, more like ideas of them that popped into his head, diagrams offered to him when his family came to mind, carried out hastily, in rapid sketches, appropriate for brief periods of attention, for flashes of recognition.

That is gone now, overcome by the spreading colors he will roll out like carpets.

Sometimes he speeds along employing the agreeably dazzling color-everywhere method. And there's his "carnival," the fair he was set on.

The young eye enjoys receiving peak sensations. Likewise, children love to hear the most piercing of shrieks, which delight their brand new auditory organs; unlike those of older people, theirs have not yet been fully tested.

Who could feel the full impact of the color red as well as a child?

One such young sanguine will answer the call of his great appetite for life by spreading out vast banks of it for his incomparable joy, for his stimulation. Red is trump. He isn't about to deny himself such a medium for life and for violence.

For another it will be green (or orange or blue) as the unique vehicle through which everything must pass and in which, strangely, all of it is contained. For days at a time, sometimes weeks, he won't hear of mixing it with other colors.

More generally, when a child gets hold of colors it is their noisy polyvalence, their rowdiness, that excites him, where he comes and goes amid the detonations. Many messy pictures may ensue, but he is not put off by this, he's not opposed to it.

Deprived of nature and, in the West, deprived of myths, city children discover that what is forbidden them elsewhere is permitted in their specially constructed workrooms. Here, fascinated by mud, slime, anything soft and mushy, anything that oozes, even including the smelly matter excreted by their own intestines, still intrigued by the condition of things before their separation into liquids and solids, into earth and water, before the setting apart of the dirty from the clean (that impeccable cleanliness and neatness so satisfying and so sought-after, almost maniacally, by adults), here at least the kid is allowed to shape, to mold what is dirty and to get dirty, to spread out thick layers of oozing color, not cautiously, but with a nameless joy that liberates him but disturbs the grown-ups watching him do it, messy and happy.

His imprudence is natural, and it pushes him on ahead. Not yet really able to walk, he runs. He falls down, gets up, and runs on.

So, on impulse, utterly confident, he takes on subjects any painter would avoid. Without hesitation he will paint the sun, neither more nor less, the sun, the great, dazzling sun.

An adventurer from the outset.

He paints the wonderful, the child does, and passionately. With his wonderment as yet intact—this reanimates it—he depicts the baroque, the giraffe, the zebra; the exultant airplane (as it is taking off), and the locomotive; a little one for whom nothing is too big or too difficult, he

renders the elephant, the incredible, the fantastic elephant, without making it any less fantastic than it is.

If anything, he makes it more extraordinary, being open to and prepared for the extraordinary, as much as for the magical, the marvelous, the prodigious. He welcomes them. He is inclined to believe in them as well as in the miraculous. However shabby his surroundings, he sees their wonders and paints them.

Studies have clearly shown what lies hidden beneath the innocence of children. They are subject to passions and shame, and these may be observed by one looking for them in their drawings, which remain, nonetheless, childish and playful.

People are invariably struck by this playfulness, which emerges even during the gravest of incidents—it is disconcerting, setting off a spasm of amusement among the worried adults.

What a difference between their strained, resolute faces and those the child evokes in his drawings.

Blank, not preoccupied, not determined, confident, amazed, good-natured, simple, precluding confrontation, faces—open windows.

Credulous, undefended, lunar faces, not combative, not resolute, unprepared for attacks or counterattacks. Some are solar.

For the toddler, one constant is his complete harmlessness. If he is perverse, and when he is naughty, he lacks means.

His resourcelessness shows through in all his drawings. Unhealthy as they may be, even markedly psychotic, an air of infantile impotence clings to them inescapably. Someday he may be cruel, but he has not yet assembled the constitution for it. To do so, a number of virginities will have to be lost and penetrated. He has always been dependent, and he cannot escape the fact.

Since his birth at the mercy of grown-ups, providers of everything he has and needs, defenseless, he is closely akin to clowns. The clown: recipient of blows he never manages to return, though he tries, only to receive all the more, too soft for a hard world, fascinating to children, who laugh at them uproariously or cry, heartbroken, affected.

How readily the characters appearing in children's paintings come to look clownish, as well as wise, and submissive! Even their houses look wise and kind.

During this period of his existence when receiving is all he knows, things take on the characteristics of this person who until only recently had

been unable to take hold of anything. Looking at the surely quite ordinary places they paint (young girls in particular)—yards, little rooms, gardens or flower beds—you'd think the universe consisted entirely of presents.

Before he knows how to speak intelligibly, in his mutters and murmurs the child tells stories. In his drawings he tells stories too. Tales of which nothing remains but mute characters on a blank sheet.

In times gone by, with a head full of stories, one avidly sought more and more. The more turbulent they were, the wiser one was thought to be.

For small children, the religious and the nonreligious are of a piece. They are religiously absorbed in both—the wonderful is their equipment.

In many villages of the African continent, black children still experience the pleasure of hearing from the mouths of calm, grave elders the always fresh tales of the wonders in the world's history, the judicious and crafty hare, animal advisors, and the perils encountered by the moon.

In their huts, the parents listen too, and believe, or are not much removed from believing.

There, children's drawings are more like stories, more obviously stories, and their characters more in movement, more in action.

Elsewhere in the world too, children's drawings are story-telling, are intended as stories. While the grown-ups immediately recognize and endlessly pore over the contours of what is known, the child continues on his unknown journey into the Unknown.

Always inclined to the unbelievable, and to believe in it, to accept the extraordinary (to him so very conceivable), united in advance with the impossible (so appealing, long ago, to the prophets, who used it as a model), he is, though more impeded in our own times, more open than he will ever be later in life; approximate to miracles, miracles of all sorts for which he craves explications that do not obstruct, such miracle-answers as leave one's being, one's emotions, undiminished, indeed, exalted.

. . .Knowing nothing, or very little and very poorly, the child does also know something. Powerless, a different power accrues to him. Children bring to painting spaces liberated from Space. All by themselves, hundreds of them, in earlier times as well as our own, have found a better way to recapture Babylonian space than with linear perspective drawing, merely methodical foreshortening. They have discovered, when they have needed it and at their pleasure, *simultaneity*, which combines and unifies the seen with the known, seen by the eye and known in the mind, the distant with the near, the outside with the inside, thereby unconcealed.

For a child it is perfectly natural to show a front wall together with a rear wall that he could not see but *knows is there.* So too, should it please him, a wall of his house will break up and vanish such that he might pass directly into the desirable interior where his dinner awaits him on the table.

Spontaneously, rather than by means of technical devices, children translate space, illustrating what adults may, with luck, rediscover, the *coexistence of the seen and the imagined,* which happens in every evoking mind. One begins with that. On this score, it is children, not grown-ups, who accurately reflect reality.

A problem, one of the most difficult to solve, if one is unwilling simply to brush it aside with considerations of perspective and optics and worse, the restrictions of photography.

A child's genius is the result of all he lacks.

Motionless for months, sightless in an envelope of flesh, sent wretched out into the open air, unprepared for a new world, being new himself, limbs he does not know how to use affixed to him, before long a ball of malaise, of hunger, of thirst, of needs and incapacities, and here he is, obligated to move, to see to it that muscles and joints are put to work. For a long time all his adventures are carried out on all fours. How natural it is that in his drawings of this half-alien body, he does not position feet and arms and hands correctly, nor in the same place two times running; accidents resulting from his as yet incomplete adoption of this "life with limbs."

One should not see in this merely signs of abnormalities. This life of straining wretchedly at every maneuver lasts only a few dozen months.

Should his movements continue to be imperfect and his muscles underexercised, invisible impulses will pass through him, desires for "other" movements. Incomparably more than adults, children imagine themselves flying, gliding, climbing, galloping, or swimming like a fish, or creeping like a reptile. Which plainly distinguishes theirs from the primitive drawings done by adults, who want to *stabilize,* and in painting to set down an accurate visual report.

Through his multiple identifications, generators of spaces, the child is constantly projected, like a bird that would be simultaneously a proud stallion.

This is one beginning for him.

. . .which will come to an end. The child becomes what he wanted and what was wanted for him.

Everything in place, orderly, situated, stabilized. Additional spaces would be unreasonable now. He doesn't *feel* them anymore.

C

Swallowing greedily since birth, the child becomes a mouth-child. Here at least there is no suffering, he isn't knocked around, not hurt, the crying stops.

Suck, kiss everybody, then go to sleep.

Getting hold of the breast, keeping hold of it, without even knowing what a breast is—it's a given, and the greatest good.

In his first years, to live means *to be open*. . .to sounds, to colors, to odors, to movements, to gestures; it's all taking, and taking in.

Doing what he sees done, doing it again, copying, learning by imitating, gathering in everything he can.

After the pencil drawings, the discovery of colors and how to handle them, after assimilating them and gaining more experience, it is likely that quite a few children—and always before adolescence—will begin to produce charged paintings—something strangely compelling about them.

No more rendering of faces or evoking them—he diffuses faces, and in doing so diffuses a world. Dilated faces, beatific or radiant, the likes of which he will never paint later, shamelessly expressing his pleasure, that he is healthy, with boundless vitality, at an age when one is still unashamed to show pleasure.

No more of those constricted figures adults smiled at disdainfully; now, in an almost burdensome profusion of colors, he broadens out: the very faces of opening, or radiance, unflinching, on display, impudent. Later they will close up again.

With little girls, it is more likely that flowers will come to stand out, not bunches of flowers, often in fact one all by itself, high on a flawless stem, a four-petal corolla, and open so wide, so conspicuous, this corolla, happy to show itself, having no fear, having patience.

The fundamental opening is still out of sight though. Are we looking at a presentiment? The same flower, unaltered, repeated day after day.

Here she is, in sum, a single flower. That will have to do.

But inside of every child, as much as outside, a man or a woman is coming on, in whose traits family members amuse themselves by thinking they see a resemblance to some relative. Other characteristics will be fleeting. In a few pictures that are overdone, or incomplete, reproaches, resentments, appeals, angers, fantasies, or mere impressions.

Among children of all sorts, open ones, it is the less open of them, and right in their drawings too—an irony of sorts—who will reveal more than the others.

Their fortunes are less childish than their voices.

One or the other of them, distant already, has come to be uninterestable. He isn't cramming himself into any lines or colors. He stays right where he began, where he cannot be trapped. Neither mountains with peaks as sharp as swords, nor battered, chopped up, bloodstained bodies would sufficiently express him.

Beyond aggressiveness, beyond anger, he embarks on full-scale ill will.

For boys and girls sullenness is a weapon, one of their only ones, and at one time or another a good many kids discover it, and that it is nearly impossible for anyone to parry its blows.

Refusal. *No* to participation, to eating, to talking, to walking, even to playing.

It is not generally understood how often a child is sorely tempted to stop, to abandon the path of development people have laid out for him, with its endless tasks, an ever more difficult apprenticeship. . .should he carry on? or is he going to stop?

Barely a few years before, his life was uneventful. No problems, no obligations, no strain. For feeding he needn't even move his masticatory muscles. And now he must learn one coordinated movement after another, for climbing, getting down, leaping, turning around, for this, for that, for hurrying, and do them over and over, until they are perfect.

Back then, without doing anything, he invariably reached the maternal island, the source, the universal.

Disgust. Repulsion. Some obscure bodily deficiency bothers him, holds him back. He meets with obstacles; he amplifies them. He sides with them. Refusal. Resistance. He shuts up.

This temptation that inclines a child to stay behind should not be compared to a rebellion. More internal. More absolute. For a time, one won't get any participation from the child at all.

A strike—the primary one. An adventure too, a world undisclosed to others.

Without a word, he has said good-bye to adults and boys and girls his own age who have submitted.

He has no more companions; they have all gone off to be enregimented as adults.

Return to the beginning—a refuge, but an impasse. Ascesis too, it could be called that, a miserable ascesis—and how hard!—for someone so young. It keeps him closed up.

What a shame one cannot look into his spirit the way one looks into his drawings.

Since cerebral activity cannot, however, be brought to a complete standstill, it does happen sometimes that the backward one has secretly devoted himself to a localized overactivity, such that one day, to everyone's amazement, it is revealed that he can calculate extraordinary sums, in his head, on call, disconcertingly fast, such as this or that enormous number of hours elapsed since a particular date in the Middle Ages or in Ptolemaic Egypt. Or some other empty arithmetical feat.

Beneath his general apathy he has concealed a very discrete mobilization, maintained and developed in silence, to help him through his long night.

An isolated knack, inadequate, but when people notice it, a banner nonetheless, his banner, his very own, upraised.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

ECHO OFF (USE OTHER ENTRANCE)

Are we there yet? *Everything*
must go, is gone. Slowly the rips
fade from memory, foment
anagrammatic tirades, saturate
pensive perambulation (percussive
reticence). My aim to
loop corners and franchise
agency—for exactly as long as
it takes to blow the candles
out inside all those
headgear.

Have you heard the one about the stalled
kaftan and the bumbling pulverizer?
The Bronx crane operator and the Lisbon
tailor? The foldaway recliner and the nylon
railings? Perhaps the crease is semi-
permanent. Perhaps the conductor erased
the links. Perhaps the person-in-the-street
gets aggravated all the way to the grave.
Though, really, really & truly, I could never
broach the subject with her. Nor with you
for that matter. Really, now! The very idea
gives me a sick feeling in the pits of my stomach.
What am I supposed to tell Mandy? Or, famously,
Albert? The drunk never steps into the same
argument twice before falling off the stool.
Perhaps that will satisfy them. Perhaps the rain
will stop bawling. Perhaps absolutely nothing
happens absolutely. Or maybe I'll take a shine

to that stridently narrow interpretation
of what was supposed to be a common project.
Project me, baby, or the skin around those shores,
well, hm, delete that intimation of mortadella,
chiaroscuro, bullet holes in the newly laundered
upholstery.

Note nonetheless
the gentle amphibracs
smashing against the
spondees. Respond please.
Or later that afternoon, taking
a walk, taking a lot more than
was being offered.

—Tell Mandy
to handle his own
sordid aspirations. I've
put my money on
his desperation outdistancing
a modest reserve of
communicative charms.
He's had a handle for years,
just no one to pick up
on it. Semaphores, like
that German job with the
circular detonators (denominators),
says who? Surely you prevaricate
or is it procrastinate or
did you mean that we are all
predestined to be stepped on?
I won't sit still for that
especially if you give me
a minute's warning
before I shoot. The lilacs,
last time I saw them, were
freshly painted, but the President
had eaten too many.

Don't crowd me.

Okay, let's see, where was I?

How many fingers am I holding up?
& now? (See what I told you, Marv.)

Arms too short to
vacate promptly?

The fire-eating
pelican decided one day to take
a detour half-a-league closer
to the Mercator Society. *Turn*
off that ratiocinator! The
sequelae had hardly time to regroup
before the President called them into
action. Follow that burlap!
That's no embroglio, that's my
subconscious!
But the journey's
bridle will carry you no
further than the edge of
the repercussions you disdain
to rule out. Society may
be the inevitable product of human
survival—but not *your* society.
The truth in pudding. Wresting
with circumspection, overrun by
rigor mentis (even a rock knows
the difference between permanence
and transparency). She sleeps
the sleep of kings having descended
to the throne just after systemwide
devaluation. Scar & recombine, split
& whimper.

"The shore is pouring green ooze
The foam is getting darker
As I swim in the cold, chilly-covered sea"

But those red ones—the biggest
mistake we ever made in chairs!

Holding Essence Position.

I told my doctor it hurt
when I lifted up my arm up.
He said, "Don't do that."
I told my doctor I couldn't stand
the pain. She said, "Sit down."
I told my wife I was losing my grip.
She said, "What grip?"

Or will you settle your differences
differently, beating scuds into suds
tomahawks into torrents of talk?
—Stupefying prattle for summery days,
shredding water like it was so much hot air.

"The markings of her
footsteps in the
rocky sand"

Sighing a far-away sigh, sputtering
Words from a place not-yet found, offering
Hope in the steam between letters.
The lap of waves against misgiving's
Disclosures. Stripped to the cement.
Because self-love's no love at all.
Like language had a claim of its own.
But the sun never touches the dark
Nor the night change anything.

The biscuit, the roll, the meatloaf.

Nationality is barbarity
Cleansing the soul out of ourselves
Preying the war will never end

sputtering & then quivering &
oscillating—the *I* behind the veil

Circumstance not existence made me
(the eyes inside the swarm).

Tiny green dots spackling the dusk.

Insinuating the rule into the abdication.

Total description of nothing
Not a thing

The unit interrogates the integer,
the digit cross-examines the figure.

Typing *finger* to see who's logged on.

"Did you know you're not answering me?"

Did you know the fire was never put out
The souffle's still cooking in the oven
The little boy with a shovel but no pail
Is ailing in the street without numbers
Or covers? Sultry exceptions to the
Glue of social fabrication (demotic
Sublime?). Kerning capital and despair
Vagrancy & honor. Honor as far
As you can throw it, dicing slices
Into the premonition.

There's no short cut to eternity, no
Excursion fare to the heavenly's databus.
Desire means less to me
Than a flue to gel its wings upon—

Torrential horseplay in a can of spleen.
Your goose is gourd, your curtains cast aside
& the tremor of the tunes is gush.
Like mice nibbling at cartilage
Ice cracking the surface (sufferance)
Device cascades along the spotted hyena's
Tail.

Liberal potions of emerald green lotions.

The tear atop the tapestry. . .

KEITH TUMA

BUNTING, OBJECTIVISM, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY (OR, WHY NOBODY KNOWS JOSEPH GORDON MCLEOD)

I have been thinking lately about the relationship of British and American poetry in this century, and pondering in particular what I take to be a waning of the scholarly interest in modern and contemporary British poetry in America. I can offer real empirical evidence that British poetry is not a raging concern in academe these days. (It is not, I might add, much more of a concern on the margins of academe where poets and poetry live.) Last year, my department advertised a job in Twentieth-Century British Literature, together with two other jobs in other fields. While we received a total of some 800 letters for the three jobs, only twenty-five or so of them responded to the job in 20th Century British Literature. We were rather disappointed in these letters, frankly, for we were hoping to find someone who might be willing to work in post-1945 British fiction, and the bulk of the letters demonstrated an expertise and interest in the most familiar figures of the pre-1945 novel: Conrad, Forster, Woolf, Lawrence, etc. From my perspective as someone who does most of his work on poetry the lack of interest in poetry was even more distressing. One young scholar was working on Kipling and colonialism. Another was working on Rupert Brooke. Two women were writing on Stevie Smith. Two men were studying Philip Larkin: one writing on Larkin within the context of Movement poetry and another within the context of a study of the audience for poetry in England and America. That last topic was of some interest to me, but my chairman said that I already had that covered. So we gave up on the notion of interviewing someone for Twentieth-Century British Literature.

As I say, we'd really wanted somebody who could work in the novel, but the depressing part of the experience for me was learning that almost nobody is working in British poetry, and those who are seem to be stuck on the same old names. Considering the fact that Americanists over the last decade or so have been busy recovering previously non-canonical and so-called marginal writers, the interest in the same old figures in British literary

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history seemed especially strange. Who was working on Edith Sitwell, I wondered? Was Hugh MacDiarmid even of interest to anyone anymore? Who knew about recent experimental poets like Allen Fisher, Tom Raworth, and J. H. Prynne? What about Black British poetry, Jean Breeze and the dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson? What about the great Roy Fisher? Peter Redgrove? Elaine Feinstein? Did anyone care about the disciples of Basil Bunting, the Northumbrians Collin Sims and Tom Pickard, or Gael Turnbull and Tony Baker? What about Bunting himself, who has been described—incorrectly I think—by more than one of his devoted readers as a lone English modernist poet? What about J. J. Adams and Joseph Gordon Macleod, two poets Bunting once held up as representatives of a second-generation of modernist poetry in England in an important and totally neglected issue of *Poetry* magazine designed to balance the issue of *Poetry* introducing Zukofsky's Objectivist poets, those second-generation American modernist poets who some of us, poets and critics alike, have been eagerly pushing towards canonical status for twenty years or more?

I don't mean really to suggest that the relative neglect of modern and contemporary British poetry in America is a horrible thing—clearly, there are many things to study, and it may be that Americans have more to learn from reading African and Caribbean literature, or Japanese. A more or less theoretical investigation of issues of colonialism and canon formation does help drive whatever interest in "British"—this time in quotes—and Anglophone literature exists today, as is evident for instance in the recent Illinois critical anthology, *Decolonizing Tradition.* Surely we have benefited from the expansion of our own canons of American literature now well underway, and the effect of work like *Decolonizing Tradition* will likely be—already is, in fact— an accelerated dash to the margins of the old Empire and a new modality in readings of the same old English canon—Forster, Kipling, and so on. All of which will do little to teach us anything about the history of British modernist and postmodernist poetry.

What I want to suggest is that the neglect of British literature, especially the neglect of modern and contemporary poetry beyond the few famous names like Larkin and Smith—or Ted Hughes, Donald Davie, Charles Tomlinson, and that once great dissertation mill W. H. Auden—might be related to the persistence of several pernicious half-truths about England and modernism. One myth has it that England has been *uniquely* resistant to modernist poetry, particularly to the experimentalist initiative we often tend too quickly to associate with American poetry in this century. Another myth has it that modernism was—and still is—an international phenomenon, something we can understand independently of national contexts, of the contingencies of national interests and the nature and history of national audiences.

Without meaning to single him out—for I have great respect for him—

I think we can understand Hugh Kenner as one of the most influential sources of some of these myths. It is Kenner, as historian and exegete of Poundian modernism, who has given us a paradigmatic example of the resistance to modernism in England in his powerful story of Pound and Wyndham Lewis's Vorticism, as told in *The Pound Era, A Sinking Island,* and elsewhere. It is Pound himself no doubt, whose own literary history written amid the fray lies behind Kenner's stories. *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is in part an attack on benighted England, and then there are remarks like the following, from Pound's preface to his *Active Anthology* in 1933: "I believe that Britain, in rejecting certain facts (facts, not opinions) in 1912-15 entered a stale decade." These facts, as Pound calls them, are related to his belief that experimentalism is vital to the health of art. He continues to say "Willingness to experiment is not enough, but unwillingness to experiment is mere death." Fact is, Pound might say, one experiments with the possibilities of art or art atrophies. And after the spectacular failure of that lone Britishism Vorticism, squashed as it was by the untimely advent of a war and the philistine snobbery of the British art public, modernist poetry for the most part left Britain, as if with Pound himself. Or so Pound and Kenner would tell us, down playing the efforts of Edith Sitwell and *Wheels* to introduce a Steinian modernism to the island's insular Georgians and forgetting—but this is to jump beyond the time-frame of the story Kenner seems to be interested in—later efforts on behalf of surrealism. To read Kenner on 20th century English poetry is to hear a savaging of all levels of English culture, from Bloomsbury to the TLS to lower middle-class weeklies. Poor Basil Bunting, a friend of Kenner's, stands alone amid the muck, or he is accompanied by Tomlinson, Geoffrey Hill, and David Jones standing on slightly smaller shards of solid turf.

Now the point is not to suggest that England was ever a hospitable home for modernist poetry. It was not, I think. These poets Kenner names were loners, members of no group or movement, though as I mean to show by discussing a British-Scottish contemporary Bunting once admired, never quite so heroically alone as Kenner imagines. I will even go so far as to admit that it is true that an aversion to experimentalism was characteristic of many spheres of British life early in this century, as social and economic historians will tell you. England's reluctance to engage in the kind of industrial modernization then underway in the United States, Germany, and elsewhere, these historians insist, goes a long way towards explaining England's precipitous decline as a world power. (The lessons of this should perhaps not be lost on Americans today.) And, to be fair to Kenner, observers other than Pound and his supporters have long noted that the prevailing modes of English poetry have been, throughout the century, resistant to experiment. Here is Conrad Aiken, for instance, writing in 1919, comparing American and English poetry:

> By comparison with contemporary American poetry—which is more empirical, drawing more boldly on the material of a wider consciousness, without so sharp a literary distinction between the poetic and the non-poetic, and more richly experimental as concerns questions of form—English poetry appears at once thinner and more "literary."

Aiken was a friendly reader of the verse of British poets such as John Masefield and Walter de la Mare and often a skeptical reader of experimental American poetry, but his remarks, with their emphasis on the greater inclusiveness and formal experimentalism of the Americans, are a powerful example of the ways in which the British have often been used as the other against which an American modernism might be defined. Against the experimental, we have the merely "literary," or, more often, the "traditional." Against the bold and the inclusive, we have something that is "thin," an unambitious poetry, mere verse.

There are many reasons why British poetry has been, for the most part, resistant to experimentalism. Most of these reasons were suggested, sometimes as mere speculation, in a remarkably persistent and acrimonious debate about the status of the two poetries—English and American—that ran throughout the sixties and the seventies, contemporaneously with the rise of the so-called New American poetry (Creeley, Duncan, Olson, etc.), the expansion of what came to be called the counterculture, and the expansion and transformation of the study of contemporary poetry in American universities. Among the many participants in this debate, including British enemies of the New American poetry like Alan Brownjohn and supporters of it such as Eric Mottram and Nathaniel Tarn, was Donald Davie, whose book on Thomas Hardy and his tradition was meant to be simultaneously a healing gesture and a defense of the prevailing modes of English poetry thought to be hostile to modernism and postmodernism. I single Davie out because he offered in another essay, not the book on Hardy, one of the more convincing accounts of the cultural differences underlying British hostility to experimentalism. In an essay on Pound, Davie argued that, in Britain, a tradition of amateurism in the arts has been and is still powerful in ways it is not in the United States. Though he did not put it in exactly these terms, what Davie was pointing to really has to do with the way in which class distinctions figure more importantly in artistic production in England, for the ideal of the artist as an amateur is traced by Davie back to the Renaissance courtier. This poet is not a workman, so to speak, but rather a gentleman of leisure producing something to improve or ornament his life; he should not seem to be

engaged too seriously with his craft, which is, after all, something more like a hobby. This idea of the poet is very much at odds with an idea of the poet as a professional, a person engaged in a specific practice structured as one practice among many in a modern division of labor where experts (we call them critics) are required to define, judge, and promote production.

We get an inkling that Davie is onto something when we note that the British still do not have the peculiar American institution of professional creative writing programs. We might also note, as Marjorie Perloff did amid these horrible confrontations of the seventies, that the British—with nothing like our economy—were much slower to burden the world with a mountain of critical journals devoted to literary history and literary theory, to definitions and discussions of moments and movements in poetry and other arts. And, if we read mainstream British publications such as the TLS, we can note also that the so-called Common Reader—as opposed to the professional or specialized reader—still functions as a powerful rhetorical tool in much British literary journalism, which pleases an American neo-conservative critic like Robert Richman, who is one of the few critics and editors around these days who seems to take British poetry—or mainstream British poetry at any rate—very seriously.

If the ideal British poet historically has been a gentleman, sometimes a gentleman in rags, it is perhaps no surprise that so much of British poetry has been marked by what A. Alvarez once famously descried as "gentility." And it is perhaps also no surprise that some of the poetry that has had most success in countering an older ideal of gentility—the work of Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes for instance—does not so much pose an alternative model of professionalism as it strategically adopts a casual amateurism more suited to a changing definition of the Common Reader. Thus in Larkin the lower middle-class anti-intellectual smart ass becomes the persona of choice in what sometimes almost seems a parodic incarnation, and in Hughes we get what Hughes must think the middle class imagines as bardic passion. In other more recently successful poets, such as Craig Raine, we have updated extensions of the cosmopolitan irony Auden first popularized, a flaneur's posturing with more of a glibness about it, little of the twisted and doubled ironies of the genre's true genius, Baudelaire, who did away with gentlemen in poetry in France. An Audenesque poetry has always done well with readers of the *New Yorker*, which only goes to prove what Nathaniel Tarn once said, that there is an England in America and an America in England. Such poetry, like Larkin and Hughes' work, can be both serious and expertly made—I do not mean simply to denigrate it. What I will say is this. This poetry—almost all of the successful or "mainstream" British poetry of the last sixty years—understands itself as subscribing to what Davie sometimes refers to as a "contract," a rhetorical contract, between reader and writer. Now the idea that poetry involves a

rhetorical contract has been somewhat at odds with modernist practice from the beginning, and it is also at odds with professionalism as most American poets understand it (or should I say as they unconsciously practice it). In terms of technique, this so-called contract, as it turns out, has been thought to involve the maintenance of certain conventions of grammatical syntax which have come to seem restrictive and limited—ideologically as well as formally—to many experimental poets both in America and England. But the specifics of the contract, the particular conventions themselves, might be thought of as finally arbitrary, changeable. What is more bothersome is the notion of a contract itself, or rather the fact that the English contract supports a poetic practice in which the ideals of the amateur and the Common Reader, the ideal of art as an avocation for men and women of leisure, are propagated. The American poet has more often been told that her duty is to her work rather than to an audience. The institution of poetry in America is dedicated to the proposition that good work will eventually be recognized regardless of whether or not it meets the needs of a contemporary audience. American poetry functions within the logics of meritocracy and technological skill.

All poets depend on conventions in their artifice, of course, and the fact that experimental poets in America have been greater in number and more successful in attaining recognition as well as in identifying themselves as part of a collective effort in poetry speaks to the ability of the American poetry audience to value experiment. It is hard to think about the nature of this audience or its impact upon poetry without considering the impact of the professionalization of literature and literary study, and this is where Hugh Kenner reenters our picture. Kenner had the good fortune to advance his history of modernist poetry at a time when America and the expanding American institutions of literary study were in need of legitimating narratives. Kenner, in describing modernist poetry as the invention of Pound and his circle, was successful in convincing us that modernism in English-language poetry might be thought of as something like an American success story, and he did this at exactly that moment in history when America's global role most needed credibility, cultural sanction. And it is no accident, I think, that so much of Kenner's work is informed by his own exceptional knowledge of the most advanced technologies in science and elsewhere, for the model of modernism Kenner has always promoted is a model of the very technocratic genius that was dominating a bifurcated Cold War World. Our faith in American technology as a universally functional and transmissible instrumentality informs—to use again my small and seemingly trite example—our hope that the "skills" necessary in writing poetry might be transmitted by instruction in professional schools of poetry writing. No gentlemen allowed, no amateurs. Only students, or,

to appeal to another middle-class model the Europeans have experience with, apprentices. (Gentlemen are not apprentices.)

Kenner's modernism often represents itself as "international," just as America would seem often to believe that our instrumentalities and institutions are potentially international. Here, for example, is Kenner on the modernist canon:

> Though the language of International Modernism, like that of air control towers, proved to be English, none of its canonical works came either out of England or out of any mind formed there. International Modernism was the work of Irishmen and Americans.

This seems like an innocuous enough statement, and one might well wonder what the point of arguing with it might be! After all, even a poet who once had British citizenship, Nathaniel Tarn, has written that the only post-Georgian poetry of value "is not English but Celtic: Yeats, Joyce, MacDiarmid, Dylan Thomas." But arguing with a description of a so-called international modernism as the work of Irish and American writers is not the point, nor is the point to determine what degree of American chauvinism is evident in many histories of modernism and in descriptions of contemporary American poetry. (And if you doubt that chauvinism figures in the presentation of even anti-chauvinistic American poets such as the New Americans, you should read Donald Allen's introduction to the anthology that brought attention to the New Americans as a group or set of movements. In the introduction to his anthology Allen wrote that his poets were worth celebrating *because* they were becoming influential abroad, as indeed they were, as the example of Tarn and others proves.) For a patriotic soul such as myself the point is simply to acknowledge that we write our histories of modernism as American writers and, for the most part, as writers participating in a profession of literary studies which has an interest in perpetuating the logics that enable it. These facts—our subject positions or institutional locations, whatever you will—do not necessarily determine or even limit our histories. But we are obliged, I think, to acknowledge the position from which we speak. And, as Americans, it is inevitably from a position of power that we speak when we talk about supposedly international events, whether these involve the history of poetry or anything else.

Power involves responsibility, or it should, and as American historians of modernism we have not been very responsible in speaking of examples of poetic modernism in England. Edith Sitwell is an obvious case, but there are others. The first book on Mina Loy, for instance, was called *Mina Loy: An American Modernist Poet,* despite the fact that Loy, who became an

American citizen toward the end of her life, is in many ways thoroughly British in her concerns, aiming her critique of orthodox religion directly at English civility. Kenner has written on behalf of Basil Bunting, as have others, but it is only recently, in the work of Peter Makin and Peter Quartermain, that we have begun to distinguish an early Bunting working under the influence of Poundian and Eliotic models from the Northumbrian poet who emerged more significantly later in life in *Briggflatts* and the great late odes. And no one has done the pedestrian work of uncovering the minor successes of British modernism, the work of, for instance, Joseph Gordon Macleod.

One of the problems in talking about British modernist poetry is the absence of self-conscious movements, with the critical propaganda and collective strategies these involve. Louis Zukofsky, by all accounts, resisted being forced by the editors of *Poetry* to coin a name for his group of poets—and he picked a miserable one—perhaps because he felt that such a name falsified real differences between the Objectivist poets. But that's always the case with such names. I like to imagine that he also felt that naming a movement in 1931 was participating in history repeating itself as farce, for the revolutionary enthusiasms that had animated the first wave of movements in this century were being appealed to by Zukofsky as a grounding tradition, a tradition of the new. But if this was indeed the case, this reluctance I am imagining for Zukofsky, he would have been missing what might have been the editors' point, their sense, conscious or not, that the pattern for American poetry had been set. All new poets after Pound and Eliot, however sadly belated, would do well, have done well, to represent themselves as part of a movement, thereby participating in the very same logic that drives the worlds of fashion and technology. To don the mantle of experimentalism has been to participate in the Americanization of systems of fashion and taste that has been underway throughout the century. Poor Louis, then a communist, made to subscribe to the institutions of capitalism. But one cannot avoid these in the small presses, as some of our contemporary experimentalists have sometimes hoped.

It has been a very strange and enlightening experience for me, in working to recover what I can and want to of the history of those comparatively rare British experimental poets, to learn something of their reception in America. The same pressures that were brought to bear upon Zukofsky in forcing him to name a movement, the same pressures that emanated from a moment when the history of what we now call high modernism was first beginning to be formulated, generated some curious prose on behalf of then-contemporary British poetry. At roughly the same time that Zukofsky was putting together his Objectivists' issue, the editors of *Poetry*—the most important of them was Morton Dawen Zabel, though Harriet Monroe still had a role—were declaring that a "new dawn" was on

the horizon of British poetry. The magazine's venerable patriarch Ezra Pound, who by this time had seen his early utopian hopes for American culture dashed, also participated briefly in *Poetry*'s enthusiasm about developments in England, though not without some ambivalence. While he encouraged his young friend Basil Bunting to put together a collection of the best in Britain for the magazine, and wrote to Zabel that the English magazine *Cambridge Left* was better than anything he had seen in awhile, good enough in fact that it made him feel that America was about to give up her leadership in poetry and culture, he also privately suspected that a British number of *Poetry* was bound to amount to American chauvinism for the way it would show up the superiority of Zukofsky's Objectivists. As I say, it is nothing short of strange to read Zabel's account of a "new dawn"—consider the avant-gardist lexicon informing that phrase—for, influenced as he obviously is by Ezra Pound, Zabel combines a now familiar version of literary history with the naive belief that what he thought he was bearing witness to in contemporary British poetry was history repeating itself. Here is Zabel on his "new dawn":

> The past two years have witnessed in England a revival of activity in both creative and critical fields that begins to threaten the proportions of another twentieth-century Renaissance. This revival doubtless profits by contrast with the aimless optimism and cheery ineptitude into which recent English letters have been guided by the postwar Georgian patriarchs. Yet it should be remembered that England, in the days of Imagism, *The Egoist*, *Blast*, and *The New Age*, was a battleground for many of the ideas and projects that lie at the center of the creative problem in modern Anglo-Saxon culture, even though the Georgian dynasty succeeded in running them out of the country once *The London Mercury* and the Squire-Bennett-Sitwell gangdom gained the ascendant.

If you think we are beyond this version of literary history, I ask you to look at Kenner's *A Sinking Island*, where there is considerable talk of the "gangs"—the very word he uses. Again, I am not saying that this version of history is correct—truth, some pessimist once said, has only a little to do with history, perhaps especially the history told by victors. I ask only that you note that, in 1932, amid the most devastating economic depression of the century, Morton Dawen Zabel was proclaiming another renaissance. Weirder still, he was proclaiming its location as England—remember that in his 1914 essay "The Renaissance" Pound had declared America the site of the renaissance he envisioned. But then Zabel is speaking of some

unified totality he refers to as "Anglo-Saxon culture," something we would hardly consider doing these days, partly because we have learned to celebrate the success of second-generation immigrant poets whose families came to America from Eastern Europe and other parts of the world, poets like Louis Zukofsky.

So how did this reading of the present as the past impact Zabel's presentation of British poetry? To put it simply, it forced him to identify as a group—I will be fair to him and admit that he does not use the word "movement"—three poets who were even more dissimilar than the Objectivist poets Zukofsky gathered and named. I should add that he grouped these poets together before Basil Bunting was asked to gather poems for a special British number of the magazine. Influenced as he was by Pound and Bunting, Zabel was his own man. Two of the poets, different as they are, can be understood as having been influenced by the work of Ezra Pound; they are Basil Bunting himself and Joseph Gordon Macleod. The other poet, like Bunting and Macleod, published his first book in 1930. He was W. H. Auden, whose work has considerably less to do with Pound's and resembles neither Bunting's nor Macleod's. If I had more time, I would work through the various contortions that allowed Zabel to represent these three poets as a group. I would also discuss Bunting's—Bunting is the best poet of the three for me—own efforts to promote with somewhat less enthusiasm the work of his peers and his discouraged remarks about the state of English poetry in general. You will have to take it from me when I say that the only convincing similarity Zabel points to is the fact that all three of these poets were ambitious in demanding that poetry recover some of the ground lost over the last few centuries to science, anthropology, psychology, and other disciplines. That ambitiousness, or inclusiveness, is something we typically associate with modernist poetry, especially American modernist poetry, no doubt much to the regret of Hugh MacDiarmid.

Because I have been implying all along that an important and responsible thing one might do is to recover some of the rare and lost British modernist poetry that our American histories of poetic modernism have neglected, I will conclude with a reading of one section of Joseph Gordon Macleod's book-length poem *The Ecliptic*. Macleod's work is Poundian in its use of collage, and the section I will quote, called "Cancer, or The Crab," may even refer to, or parody, Pound's "Canto XIII." Though in an autobiographical note Macleod once admitted Pound's liberating impact on him, he is no mere imitator; there is more exuberance and playfulness in Macleod than in much of Pound, and also less rhythmical control. His diction is perhaps more idiosyncratic than Pound's, closer in places to the scientisms one finds in parts of his compatriot MacDiarmid. I should mention, since he is completely unknown as far as I can tell, that Bunting described this writing at the time as the most interesting he had read since

The Wasteland. So far as I know, the last time one of our American poets mentioned Macleod's poem was when Kenneth Rexroth included "Cancer" in an anthology of British poetry published in 1949. By that time Macleod had apparently temporarily stopped publishing poetry, at least under his given name. Eventually he adopted the pseudonym Adam Drinan, and, while living in the Hebrides wrote and published a very different, much less identifiably modernist poetry, while continuing to write prose—he reviewed his own work—under his given name. Here, then, in its entirety, is that section of *The Ecliptic* entitled "Cancer," a poem which explores one psychic archetype among the twelve in the poem, the man suffering a crisis of the will, the man of divided consciousness. I read it today as an American critic offering a kind of homage to the fragmentary reality of a British modernist poetry I hope we can begin to acknowledge:

CANCER, OR, THE CRAB

Moonpoison, mullock of sacrifice,
Suffuses the veins of the eyes
Till the retina, mooncoloured,
Sees the sideways motion of the cretin crab
Hued thus like a tortoise askew in the glaucous moonscape
A flat hot boulder it
Lividly in the midst of the Doldrums
Sidles
The lunatic unable to bear the silent course of constellations
Mad and stark naked
Sidles
The obol on an eyeball of a man dead from elephantiasis
Sidles
All three across heaven with a rocking motion.
The Doldrums: 'region of calms and light baffling wind near
Equator.'

But the calms are rare
The winds baffling but not light

And the drunken boats belonging to the Crab Club
Rock hot and naked to the dunning of the moon
All in the pallescent Sargasso weed
And windbound, seeking distraction by the light of deliverance
For
What are we but the excrement of non-existent noon?
(Truth like starlight crookedly)
What are we all but 'burial grounds abhorred by the moon'?
And did the Maoris die of measles? So do we.

But there is no snow here, nor lilies.
The night is glutinous
In a broad hearth crisscross thorn clumps
Smoulder: distant fireback of copse
Throws back silence: glassen ashes gleam in pond
The constellations which have stopped working (?)
Shimmer. No dead leaf jumps.
On edge of lawn a glowworm
Hangs out its state-recognized torchlamp
Blocks of flowers gape dumb as windows with blinds drawn
And in the centre the rugate trees
Though seeming as if they go up in smoke
Are held like cardboard where they are.
Bluehot it is queer fuel to make the moon move.

Agesias said: 'Nero was an artist because he murdered his mother
Sensibility (subliminal) is of more importance than moral obligation (prandial).'
But Agesias paints cottages in watercolours and fears his own mother
Barbaricus said: 'I am passionately in love with Gito who spurns me for Praxinoê'
But until he saw them together he was merely disturbed by Gito's eyelashes
Galônus said: 'The subsequent shrivelling of an orchid doesn't alter the value of its beauty.'
Decanus said: 'Joy in nothing. Either dies joy or what produced it.'

But Galônus is attractive to women, Decanus obese, poor, obtuse.
Epinondas said: 'I have been a liar, now no longer so.'
Zeuxias said: 'What I have always been, I shall remain, a fool.'
Is it better to be self-deceived or lazy?
Epator was drunk for two days: Theodorus traced his disease to college, Iphogenês saw God and died,
And so down the Alphabet, aye, and the Persian,
With variegated gutturals and sibilants, the Gaelic with diphthongs and triphthongs,
Choctaw with three different clicks
Each letter is somebody
But the Crab is nobody
Nobody
Nobody
A ganglion of neurotic imitations
Composed of each letter in turn
Jointed by conflicts he does not want
A word that never existed with a sense nobody can understand.
Suffering for the sins his father refused to commit
He sits and thinks about the twiddling toes of Gunerita
A boy-girl or girl-boy of an average pulchritude
Haunted by phantoms of his female self
Whom he has never seen but composed himself, thus:
Breasts of Augustina brains of Beatrice
Arms of Capucine on the motherliness of Dorothea
Eyes of Evelyn in the brow of Francesca
Fragrance of Gretchen with the understanding of Helen
This he desires, but despises:
Bhah!
Always sideways, crabs walk.
Either he is not fit for this world
Or this world not fit for him. But which?
After all this pain of development is there neither interval nor reward?
They lured him with promises,
Now it has all slipped sideways
What is the good, I ask you, of going into a melting-pot
If fated to melt again after getting out of it?

The answers are: He is not out of it
Determined to budge not from yon slippery rock
Not a yard, no, nor an inch, no, nor a barleycorn's breadth
For Chance is not blind but unimpedable
And we call it blind because
Since we frustrate it only by chance
We prefer to shut our own eyes.

The crab however crawls on.

He must therefore be a crab subnormal.
One day, one of his foreclaws, assembled as usual by many men,
Being longer than the other, turns and pinches his tentacles
With the other he pinches the persons that assembled the long one
Next day the short one, equally alien, is the longer
And the process is reversed.
In mass production one hand never knows
The evil the other is inspiring it to do
This is a heretic even to the faiths he fails to believe
So worthless, awkward, unintelligible,
The crab crawls on.
He has suffered because he was ugly
Let him be cruel now that he is attractive
Caring not whether he fructifies cruelty or is merely hard on self.
We trap our goldfinch trapping our souls therewinged
Sacrifice our mad gods to the madder gods:
We hymn the two sons of Leda and Zeus Aegis-bearer
We don't. We drink and drivel. My
poor Catullus, do stop being such a
Fool. Admit that lost which as you watch is
gone. O, once the days shone very bright for
you, when where that girl you loved so (as no
other will be) called, you came and came. And
then and there were odd things done and many
which you wanted and she didn't not want.
Yes indeed the days shone very bright for
you. But now she doesn't want it.

Don't you either,
booby. Don't keep chasing her. Don't live in
misery, carry on, be firm, be hardened.
Goodbye, girl: Catullus is quite hardened,
doesn't want you, doesn't ask, if you're not
keen—though sorry you'll be to be not asked.
Yes, poor sinner. . .what is left in life for
you? Who'll now go with you? Who'll be attracted?
Whom'll you love now? Whom say you belong to?
Whom'll you now kiss? Whose lips'll you nibble?
—Now you, Catullus! you've decided to be hardened.

How can I be hardened when the whole world is fluid?
O Aphroditê Pandêmos, your badgers rolling in the moonlit corn
Corn blue-bloom-covered carpeting the wind
Wind humming like distant rooks
Distant rooks busy like factory whirring metal
Whirring metallic starlings bizarre like cogwheels missing teeth
These last grinning like the backs of old motor cars
Old motor cars smelling of tragomaschality
Tragomaschality denoting the triumph of self over civilization
Civilization being relative our to Greek
Greek to Persian
Persian to Chinese
Chinese politely making borborygms to show satisfaction
Satisfaction a matter of capacity
Capacity not significance: otherwise with an epigram
Epigrams—poems with a strabismus
Strabismus being as common spiritually as optically the moon
The moon tramping regular steps like a policeman past the
houses of the Zodiac
And the Zodiac itself, whirling and flaming sideways
Circling from no point returning through no point
Endlessly skidding as long as man skids, though never moving,
Wavers, topples, dissolves like a sandcastle into acidity.

Is there nothing more soluble, more gaseous, more
imperceptible?
Nothing.

ANDREW SCHELLING

THREE POEMS

ON THE WALL

No way to just look
at a wall map
        they come
swarming back,
Lévi-Strauss saw the century's garbage
flung in our faces.
Every stop
a village well, or curbside cook-fire
lit from old
        engine gaskets.

Can't quite get the chattering local speech—
proud, eloquent women
barefoot
        waving their hands.
Try not to listen.
It's ghosts. money. Not enough food.
So they scowl when a man
        walks too near—
and quickly shut up.
Covering the swell'd up feverish
child with a shawl.
        insects flicking her tiny
        anus & mouth.

Got here by car but—why are we here?
squatting at toilets

crusted with dry
shit and blood.
Hearing the click
and deeper down cable strum
of spun rolled steel,
buses and trucks moving inland
over the hills—
a global economy.
Red lines are shipping lanes
some borders are under dispute.
There they all are
on the wall.

FOR A TRIBAL GIRL IN BANGKOK

Your eyes earnest
wide northern cheekbones
and black swept hair

taking a few minutes off stage
to try out English
with folk at the tables

No
never had a child
The one under the lights has

the heavy one
pulling a string of orchids
from her cunt

Patpong District, i:93

RUN MY HAND UNDER

Does Nature remember, think you,
that they were men, or not rather that
they are *bones?*
—H. D. Thoreau

In a redwood grove, on a low hill facing east, I bent over a shovel and buried my dog. Sun pierces a tree, the far ridge, a fresh growth already laces the turned-over sod. St. John's wort in the shade. Where dirt's most disturbed poison oak. Oneself, to end up, on a coastal North American hill, somewhere, hell realm or bardo, beyond whatever—a comfort to consider those bones—

Or run my hand over elastic frail ribcage, the woman I love, her pulse of desire. What store of affection inside the bonehouse? Tilt of the chin, and how her denim skirt falls to her shoes. The things a man loves. Her face could be face of a dog. Face of ash. Ash and a trickle of bone.

It's an old Buddhist trick, got out of Mongolia, some Paleolithic recess up north. Dress up in fur. Take off the fur. See your companion a scatter of bone. Two ossuaries just a membrane between you. Remove it like clothes.

Now love her like that. Take off her fur.

Taste a nipple, go for rough skin but find rib. Thigh against thigh, seeming so fierce, it's only a femur, good for a flute. Try to be delicate, back on your passion, tangle of nerve and wet tissue, all those veins at the crotch. Find pelvis—hollow and dry. I came through that? Hard cartilage. Now try her mouth and touch teeth.

Knucklebone, bone of the ankle, down past the kneecap. Run my hand under, beneath beneath. Where does it come from? How did it get here?

Yet it's heaped on the bed. Next to a window. Imagine the aftermath. Hipbone on hip.

September 1986

HORACIO COSTA

FROM THE BOOK OF FRACTA

(Tr. from the Portugese
by Charles A. Perrone)

1. Propositio

I should have so many things to tell you about this my latest publication were it not for my loathing of the very notion of dwelling upon these poor poetic doings of mine, which are nothing more than fragments of thoughts that, for a host of unfavorable circumstances, did not manage to flow and fill the broad new moulds I had imagined. They are merely born fragments and momentary vibrations: they merely point, here or there, to paths I *could have* taken to do something profound and original.

Antero de Quental, "Letter to Tommaso Cannizaro," Sept. 5, 1888

I
La Storia

Alveoli imitate trees
in Bangui, Bokassa to Napoleon.
This is a novel.

II
Cosmicosis

OM. And then a gesture: the Void appears
on the balcony of the night. Down below, words,
an angry mob, proclaim their master.

III

Drummondiana

A loved B who loved C who loved
no one. Volition ends in dispersion:
pyramids/powder to frame the lovers' lane.

VIII

Zone

Don't count the number. No first or last, the waves of the sea.
Fragments:
before the palm groves, how slow the flock. They come come
come. Calm is
zebras' indefinite chewing. Exegi monumentum aere perennius.
Tantalizing.

IX

Pontus Euxinus

I lie down on the divan. The more microscopic the vision, the
greater the diffraction
of the subject. And I spoke of my father: feet leaving tracks in
the sand.
So we slipped. Dunes invade the middle of the landscape.

X

Il Pensieroso

. . .et c'est la première. Bronze body before the sea; the house of
thought,
foam. In each grain the chronicle of the pharaohs. Or nothing.
You asked me.

The response of the hierophant to Ptolemy's envoy: the proton falls.

XI
Port wine

Cin-cin. The center is everywhere, periphery where time ends. Enterexit is the prescription: at point scarlet we remember the Grape, the Uva. Slowly I drink
from the fountain of youth, I raise the golden calves to Ponces-de-León. *Tawny.*

XIV
Cosmycosis

Viscera come out on the balcony of the night and face their Master.
As they materialize, lymph, blood, ducts of thought fall.
Fungi, discontent task of nothingness, occupy the asphalt of the Avenue.

XV
Black Hole

The furious animal swallows its own halos. Black the color of the inner light. An almost, its mask. We heard its angelic omnivorous complaints. In the darkness of the room, I think of my father.

XIX

De Motu

Eppur si muove, the shortest distance is always a curve,
light and larvae dance on apples, the beast eats, eats and shits
shadows. An image of the universe hung from a mental tree.

XXI

What area can hide the liberty of a line?
From planes to mounts universes relate, pulsars heave and pant
in interstices. If it please thee, inscribe thy fractality in plain skin
papers.

XXV

Marbleized Papers

Sponges, sperm, stylemes, a taste for titles in foreign tongues,
she keeps knocking on the roof of my mouth, amphibian leaps
in the cavern.
Sume superbiam quaesitam meritis. The droplets of rain slide
down the marble.

XXVII

Cosmy-icosis

They were born of self-determination, a fertile parade through
the cosmos
in this potter's object. A week later, from their caps, a burst of
brown powder.
The inexorable wilting began. Mushrooms can't bear light.

XXVIII

The Fragmentist

From the bars of these clothes I regard the world. Man views
Uva. What is it
that He sees? The flower of doubt has lightning roots, it was a
spectral life,
and I was unaware. A black sack the Harlequin will wear, an
allusion to Creation.

XXX

The Fossil Way

(Cœlacanthus Latimeria Chalumnæ)

Some look at blank walls; others fast on Fridays. Ecstasy asks
for method. In the Comoros a fish survives, on improbable fins
moves along;
The bottom of the sea, of lava. The document is there, and
moves along on fins.

XXXI

Fear Phoenix

there: parade for no one orgasm or sepsis
scholastic logarithmic beer like method, like
Word? rhythmic horror: there stars explode

XXXII

The Poetic Itself

le silence éternel the spinning of these wheels with cadavers
aflame in the middle
of the day these birds preparing their beaks all these eyes
observing the rite

the mountain split apart the wide open furnace *Babel to no avail* m'effraie

XXXVI

The Negative Way

(Key lock singing, la-tee-dockers, K. Looney, eh)

Reads shells, throws the I-Ching, fasts on Fridays, a chest of Zen,
adores Jung, frequents
the Torah and the Tents, tosses a coin a day into the Fontana di Trevi, *bushman,*
collects Coca Colas, believes in Quetzacoatl Mem de Sá in the Satanic Dr. No.

XXXIX

Tsunami

(Leçon)

Leaning on his dictionary, diligent, the poet invents his Krakatoa.
Not here, but
in the Pacific, which was discovered by Vasco Núñez de Balboa.
And the Wave comes,
eighty ferocious meters high, aloha! no one's ever seen a more crackpot invention.

XL

El Azahar

Windmills reduce the cosmos; memory founds the wetlands. And them
I shall wed, flowers of doubt, bouquet queen. I return home to the tortured form

of the mental orange groves. Not even the landscape is unique:
95% sky 5% whatever.

XLV

The Temptation of Saint Anthony

in the heavens the third **V**ision examines monstrous ornithorhynchus
in the head heart the **V** of e**V**angelism gnaws the frame of the ancient boy
under my feet *the breaking of the **V**essels* the absolute rats absol**V**ing

XLVI

In the Society of Stones Frogs Sometimes Croak

We moderns know that Halley's Comet is shaped like Saudi Arabia.
That a minuet dances with asteroids. That like gauze the atmosphere is thin.
That earth itself like the atmosphere is thin. That it's out of fashion to drink hemlock.

XLVIII

Tezcatlipoca

Mirror of mine, black mirror, everyone's mirror. Image with no reflection: up in steam, up in smoke. The fragment-man reduced to an atom. In the folds of the universe, the scream, still, resounds.

XLIX

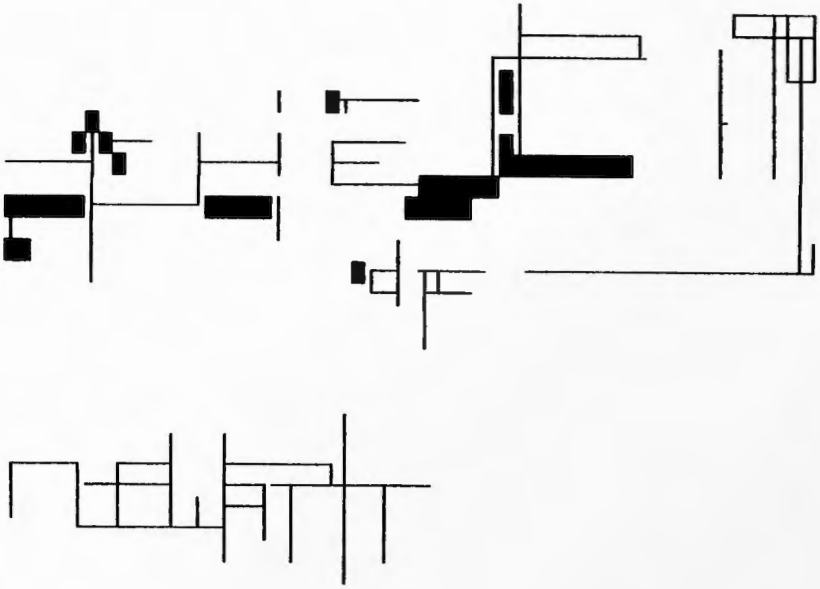
Supernovæ

the omnivorous angel eats its body and the proton falls; light exchanges into matter
and matter, *darling,* into nothing; nothingness appears in the void and the body splashed with
signs of extinct light is matter but empty; the void, *darling,* inaugurates history

AMIRI BARAKA

Without listing my e.g.s, elementals of where I thought the shadow of me had passed. Where you been, bend. I could still produce a portrait of lived. Internally they say you feel, an they talking about the outside of there. Their are the filled up of you seein. Talk it mo. Talk it jo. at you candy sto.

I am the only story telling me here out like this. Telling a seen it living, my breath comes out and the world goes in, your breath and ideas I pick up like picking a banjar.



THE CITY OF NEW ARK
A POEM OF DESTINY

FROM BOOK ONE

***

New Ark Space
is forked
pitch
black Sun
at noon.

The people lay
roll
laid &
stretched yet
incompletely
out!

Yet they are truly *out!*

Mostly Children
of the
Sun

Descendants of the Earth's
1st Priests
& Scientists

Try to dig through the concrete
who 'em is
& Yes from No

What is Good
& Why
The Madness?

*

In New Ark

there's grey
icicle
Santa Claus

death
bldg.

Lincoln there Fucked up
in stone.

There's niggers who are completely
Greasy Heads
Words Greasy
Heads inserted
like pee pee smells
just behind the
vestibule

Yet A Broad
Mother fuckers of all
descriptions

gentled by media lighting
the noise holds a framing silence

Solo
&
Ensemble

We all rock w/ the ark
& try to make our
33 or 45
degrees

Endarkened or
Dead!

Wit me A
is repeating
better to
see

than dream
better to dream
than
New Ark be dead!

is people
borne reborn
in sea
See
Seers
&
Scene
See in See out
The ark is
45°
&
90°
The 33 must have 12 disciples
A See
Sun
Year
is
AFFIRMATIVE

To raise the full
sail
Like a Pyramid
The
Re
Ra
Ray
Rah
Crown
Folk
us
IG
NITE
ARE

(The *letter*
The *let*

O Ship
of
Zion
If we turn
from thee
our hearts
are wither

We are not NEW
to a
Knower

I PUPIL

MAGNIFIER

AIR WATER EARTH

FIRE

SIGN

& SIGNIFIER

PREY & PRAY

Before life
& eaten
by it
until
We house ourselves
with
living
goodness

SAYS
SAILS

Intercourse

Stops
Latter
How long
the raise

the gratitude
living

under
standing
Can

Wholly
&
Circular

Go
Wheel

The Tower
&
Trip

Heaven
&
the journey

Tortured Slaves
below decks
Chained
in
Shit
&
Vomit

therein our city
carries in itself
the Move
& the Stop
among the
endless waves
of beings

Rock Ark
Role Tied

the things of Standing & Moving
the being & the been

Black Rhythm
Turning Blue
Ra returns
from his
Western
Tour.

New Ark
Language
Its words
always
that show
the change

circle
the square
the view
standing
under
A Pyramid

If you can imagine
what can be real

if you can find out
What is

That the earth's masters
will save it
& live

the others
will die out

or become
extinct

& unknown.

That we claim the ancient natural
order of humanity
into question

That we are pledged!

Rapture

Sun blown jism
perfect
intelligence

Go—
Come
Like The Sun Beats
Space
into
Speech

Our Hearts
Rap
The Sun's language.

I talked to one "sailor" the other day

What is disappearing is ignorance, wheresom'ever you be in what is ignored. The dross of definition.
We seek what we know, and stumble into error fully armed. We never thought we'd suffer, never thought pain would get us where it wanted us. Except when we understood, it was all pain, and we were counting as we fought, the blows extended by the memory of being everywhere at the same beat. Except that never is if you try to remember. You are always carried with you, you are never absent, and never alone. People confirm life for us, but they cannot live it for us.

When you begin to see yourself more naturally it is late and the laws weigh against you like a body like a chanting to you a glowing underneath the cloak of name.

We understand how much better the future will be. We are somebody's future, and somebody's past. The present is what we struggle to fully experience and then understand. And it is not waiting for us, it's beckoning throbs inside us claiming us yet alive, yet capable of love.

—Interlude Captain

Ark Talks Swims Walks Loves

What ever you're selling, that's out from jump. No Selling. Selling is out, is over. Like the wave, it says goodbye, to all that. What ever you're selling arrest yourself until we get there to speak to you. Our new constitution says No Selling. No Merchants. No Traders. We're for all flavors, and no favors. How could it be a favor, and everything is here to touch. Or speak to. The spirits want no favors, they in flavors. Like the colors. The weather. No favors. NO privilege. And no selling. No selling nothing. NO yourself neither. No selling nothing. You cant give yourself away neither. No free you's and no selling. You is everything, and when that dawns, your day will be here, your ship, o ark, will be and your sea, and your free, oh Ark, o dark lovely ark. Oh place of where, oh self of all telling.

So without the merchandising, the commodification, and no favors, or tricks. We depress lies flatter, ground them. So they are merely or merest. So they are brief frowns dispersed by afternoon. Vague woulds and shoulds, keep the do's the be's the is from bad as what is alive hence good. Good is all you got, and that's the truth. That is the living breath, who is breathing is God, that's everything.

The Muslims can tell you if you can tell them something, that Allah is everything and whatever is left, or right. Every bit of information. Computed Total computed, computing, is Allah. Just everything. And its spirit. Its force. It's power. It's history. It's knowledge. Everything!. All. A L L.

Now you a something. A some. Sum. What ever. You is. Or who ever. If you dont understand, who you telling it to, then. They a a. A A. A A. They A A. All is A, the 1st principle the eye, looking down, like the sun rays. God looks down, but that is the sun, like a corpuscle carrying the goods, eats, air, information, anything you gotta have. Prayer needs sun. Preyers, on the other hand, eat, everything, or sell it. They illegal. Prayer is the consultancy with the before yourself, whatever. The not here, which is the majority. The whatever you come out of and will return to. If you can penetrate that veil in some way. Put yr self in touch with the before yourself. The before this world. The after this world. The is that be shoots out of. Pre peter. Pre come. Get in touch with the Not.

****

The coming and going are proofs of the constant is, coming and going back to itself. The science is understanding this and why. We're like animals roaming and biting. But we want more which signifies like my man my ol man on the tree top screaming for a little civilization from the roaring meat eaters checking him out meat frustrated. He telling jokes, throwing doo doo down on em. Signifying.

The Africans were the signifying monkey, and still, it seems, must is. Must is, mus' aint dont sound right. You got to get back up on the two legs, and signify. You got to do the triple dip jump step and signify. Rap. He in the tree, way high, rapping, beating on the wood. Talking about Hey Hey Hey, I'm what's happening. For half a million years so it was. Then the flood and whatnot. You got weird cousins suddenly. Dudes went off to find out what was and when they return, all ugly, riding horses and shit. We say, damn, what happen my man, you look really weird. Why you look like that? And they growl and start that selling talk. That merchant shit. They say ask us do we want to buy something. Nobody know what that mean. Old black John say fuck that buying. He tell em about a picture on a big rock.

They talkin about getting. Nobody understand, except ol John said fuck all that. That's old. You'll get surely fucked up with that. Took all the jewelry and shit with em. Some ol plates, went away from here talking the same shit. Buying And Selling. Last dumb shit they say is that stealing is where it's really at. Talk about stealing is high art. Fuck it, we went back

up and looked at the 1st sea, the 1st cloud, the 1st voice, the first song, and felt cool. For centuries.

Yours,
"Ark Am" 8/89

Ark

Wants to know
Wants to be and is for that
Wants not to
afloat, air driven, love driven, growing into the babe
seed is what you saw, story is what "your" stored of that
so the seed carries all the information, of scene, and re
makes whatever to be.
Ark lives to live. Life is specific not abstract, not an IOU, except seeing means you seen, and the scene goes on as you do as you are as you will, want, to be, you keep lying to yrself, but when God is busted, watch who be in the papers. God exists only as the total of what is
Goodness is God
's only life
life is God
Death is not evil, Death is the beginning of the new year. Yeah! Only what cannot exist is evil. That's why.

Murder is the illusion that life is evil. So that is evil. Sin is what does not exist. Sin means **without**. With Out being the never. The not is not the never. The never cannot. The not, is what's womb.

Dont you get tired of animals and living
with animals in a cage? Dont you get tired
of animals telling you how humans live? Dont you get tired of the Dead, messing you up and they on vacation?

At the top of the highest building is where the new is. The known is below already what is not, the new is in its womb waiting to be fertilized. The fertilizer brain. Your history is your tail, your snake mind, ideas are the day

time for the sun, of the black woman. Night. Who is is. An Ethiopian.

Everything is a real idea, the life of before the idea, the womb of the idea is real thing, the idea is the path into and away from real, is, carries every, idea is thing breathing, seeds. The G is a seed, A, 1st principle, B, from the is, C existence, in the sea, where the seeds are, see hence seen.

D is the specific where, that manifesting of. E the out of, the energy, what issues, what goes, exhaust, ex it, from which the it breath issues. Blood always talk precise. D shit aint right he say.

Like a cry, E, EEEEE, the issue, the going, the gone. The F is the Flag, the being, the signal of, proof of, existence of. Speed it means, because that determines appearance, how fast among fast, to mean where. The G, is the seed. G! Also gravity measurement, what force into the is substance. Earth and Sun mixed with water, H the tower, the prayer consolidating building, development. So I, is the God number 9, the eye of Ra. Sun and Life, derived therefrom.

The 10 is the rebeginning. I re turned, like the circle, and we arcs of carried in its being, as ourselves, eggs to egos. The egg entering the cycle of be is ego, the egg, is stored information. What I seed!

Ra is Re, because only that is can re produce!

****

Actually, 1 is 2. I got that from Monk 1st, then Marx! 0 is 1! The whole is Un. Unified. Unitary. Atone means to get it together! Be one. 1 requires 2 elements. The is (0 = All) and the being. Their connection, via "night's" history, her tail, memory, total absolute everywhere&thing. A tail, A joint. Connect. Jazz is the meeting the motion the heat the feeling the coming, is being Re being. Be is always Blue when it first get here.

"Fucking" on the other hand means beating, as in fighting! Not love. The "other" beating, rhythm, as in Be At ing, self conscious reflection of everything. Life conscious of Life. Its perfection is its ultimate turn, goal ("gold").

We move supposedly from Fucking To Love as Animals to Humans to Self Created Consciousness, as total harmonic expressions of the endlessly expressed.

Be is is and however and wherever from is manifest specifically. All is All is. Is Is.

The conflict of the journey away from the Mother is summed up as Fucked Up for the totally negative vs Pregnant and the ecstasy of Creation.

As Art. (Exists as opposed to Not.) Vs. Arent. Art Vs. Arent! The Creative Principle Vs The Death Principle.

The Devil then wants Never. Wants Arent. The Devil is not Mythology, there is a scientific principle this concept expresses. Religion was literally The Way of The Sun, The Way of Life.

The Sun Worshippers confirm the obvious, the most scientific explanation of how and why we are here and everything else we see. No Sun No thing. We get jumpy when it goes on tour, not to mention goes out forever? Ha!

Mythology and Metaphysics are the lies the sins the tools of Devils what pushes evil De Evil as it is Death. It is a lie since it is impossible to dismiss the be and even lies must pretend to be the truth. Must pretend to be real, and their realness attests to the constancy of is, as definer and continuer. We test our understanding, like we breathe, in and out. The spirit, literally breath, the top of the church, the spires, the spiral, like the dialectical motion of is, the infinity sign turned upright like it sposed to be, not parallel, the endless mindless metal frenzy. Cat nip. Bees get high on hot honey.

But turning and rising, the spirit. The advance to what we were always. The animal is the distance the out breathing away from and at the same time, essence, to rebecome its total and by doing be whatever it is then expressing or there expressing. . .its where (wear) tale (tail) time is the reverse expression of expression. Emit is powerful, the explanation of time, slow motion. What stops is evil because it is a lie. An illusion. Time expresses elapse, or power, or distance, or history, the number of seeds, except if there was such a real thing as time, there could be no is.

Time will become obsolete when the snapshots of everything and everything are conscious love.

So we are life fighters. Fighting for life. Death is our enemy. Ignorance and Disease, its weapons. Consciousness is our God self, the everything else goes and comes but the path, the road, the you we love, the me we need, is alive. Be for life and against its enemies. This is one things I learn.

Marxism simply tries to bring the Divine (Mystery) into our fingers as known and usable. As it is. As long as there are mysteries we are animals. And our animal spirit is what kills us.

****

In Ark everybody know we need love
tell by the way they walk
tell by the way they talk
by the way they dress, what they love
what they hate

Everybody in the Ark know
We need love.

This is where Freedom come in.

Blue Monk!

****

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The Tale The Hand Itself Tells
Selected Poems. Robert Duncan. Edited by Robert J. Bertholf. New Directions: New York, 1993.

> *What is missing is the tale the hand itself tells in its way of working.*
> —RD

Occasionally a book appears that demands a significant growl. I write as a guardian, and because I think a growl of angry betrayal's in order with this book. At issue is what Robert Duncan once termed "the issue"—the question of who presents a poet's work, whose directives they follow, and what their motives are—a turbulence Duncan tried to address for the last twenty years of his life. New Directions, publisher of Duncan's poetry for thirty years, has now brought out a volume designed, one imagines, to make his poetry more readily available. Yet in its arrangement the book seems not to take Duncan's own directives seriously, as though the poet doesn't need to mean what he says.

First, to note that each of Duncan's five New Directions books is still in print and they provide most of the material for this volume, so the purpose of the book is not to restore unavailable work but to present in more popular format poetry that can be had elsewhere. Duncan wrote many earlier volumes over a twenty-year period though, some fugitive, some widely distributed. From that output came two significant collections, published during the sixties by Fulcrum Press in England—*The First Decade* and *Derivations*. In the nearly 300 pages they collect, you find a terrific amount of important and not-at-all juvenile writing—all of it to be found only with arduous foraging through first edition book shops or special collections libraries. Might not this have been an opportune time for publisher or editor or whomever to get some of this work out, and available, and seen in the

context of Duncan's readily available New Directions books? Yet more than two thirds of this new book draws from work still in print.

In his selection from those out-of-print books, editor Robert Bertholf sensibly keeps one of Duncan's early "serial poems" intact—"Medieval Scenes"—and picks hodgepodge from some Stein imitations. That's okay, but beyond that the selection's notable more for omissions than for savvy arrangement or exciting retrievals. I'll note a few absences. "An African Elegy" ought to have appeared. I don't know that anyone would defend it as one of Duncan's finest poems, but it holds an indisputable historic status. It is the now legendary poem John Crowe Ransom accepted for Southern Review in 1944, then backed off in a reflex of fear or revulsion, and refused to print when he read Duncan's essay "The Homosexual in Society." At the time Duncan tried to engage Ransom in a public forum—a courageous act in the late years of World War II. Now would be timely (our country's theopolitical right planning eight statewide initiatives condemning homosexuals for election-year 1996) for the poem to come into print, accompanied by a brief account of the controversy that raged around it and Duncan's remarkable public stance.

More significant though, I can think of no reason why an editor would leave out what is widely considered Duncan's best poem prior to his New Directions books—"The Venice Poem" of 1948. Rereading Ekbert Faas's considerable biography of Duncan's early years, one sees "The Venice Poem" as Duncan at some breakthrough point—Faas calls it his "most daring and accomplished work before *The Opening of the Field.*" Duncan held it in like esteem—invoking it as the place he found, for the first time, "the full structural imperative of a form seeking to come into existence in the process of the poem" *(Caesar's Gate)*. Why if Duncan thought so highly of it would a *Selected* pass it by? mere oversight?

I cannot carp at poems included here from Duncan's three major books of the sixties. Many of the best do appear, including "Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar," "My Mother Would be A Falconress," and the peerless Vietnam War "Passages" to which there is nothing comparable in American poetry. I quaver at criticizing any book containing work of such high an order. May all readers of poetry keep these poems near at hand!

But what this book does with the two volumes of *Ground Work* troubles me. Brief background: in a 1969 statement, Duncan avowed that he would not publish a commercial book for fifteen years. Following this decade and a half's self-imposed exile, during which years he defined how he wanted his poetry to appear on the published page, Duncan insisted that *Ground*

Work I be not conventionally typeset, but printed off a typewritten script he himself prepared personally.

You can look up his argument for typescript versus typesetting in John Taggart's 1974 issue of MAPS—"A Preface prepared for Maps #6: The Issue." In it Duncan allows that the "typed copy is for me the primary 'score' of the poem," and declares with some bitterness that "the printed version. . .rides over decisions that appear in the typed version as notation of the music of the poem." This blunt Preface, partly a blast at John Martin of Black Sparrow for his handling of Duncan's book *Tribunals: Passages 31-35*, describes a "beautifully and expensively printed book that thruout wilfully goes against the directives of its author wherever such directives did not meet the taste of the printer and the publisher." Such, continues Duncan, *"was the particular case of my at last deciding to publish my work in my own typescript."* (My italics.)

How else overcome a publishing industry founded upon "The need of the press and not the need of the poet's art"? Duncan was looking ten years into the future, to 1984's *Ground Work Before the War*. That book, set from Duncan's personal typewritten text, includes a preface with the same insistence—"All 'typographical' features are notations for the performance of the reading." Sad to realize that a generation of poetry readers are coming up now, with no inkling of the wizardry Robert Duncan could display in a public reading. This very bookish man could weave a spell over an audience I've seen no other poet match, and there's nothing in the *Selected* to alert future readers to this cognoscenti's vocal art.

Eccentric or difficult as *Ground Work I*'s typographical layout may seem, it is nonetheless what the poet had come to decide was the appropriate way—the legitimate way—for his work to appear. "This very matter of the typewriter and the author's work and the emergence of the idea of our taking over the means of production of our copy into our own hands is where we must start." Yet a scant three years later, *Ground Works*'s second volume, *Into the Dark;* put together after Duncan's health had collapsed, and evidently directed through press by others than himself, silently passes over the earlier directive and goes with conventional typesetting. Which occasioned from Ken Irby (Conjunctions 12) a carefully thought-out and rather damning review of Robert Bertholf's editorial job.

The publication of *Ground Work: Into the Dark* is now water under the bridge. Pointless to curse Bertholf aloud, or the decision-makers at New Directions (though in private certain friends can still fling themselves into a rage). And now the *Selected Poems* without a word of explanation again

overrides Duncan's directives. Not only are poems from *GWII* again typeset, but without courtesy of a single word of explanation so are all poems from *GWI*, which had originally appeared in Duncan's painstakingly prepared typescript. One cannot but feel it a disavowal of Duncan's poetics. "The need of the press and not the need of the poet's art." Or does one not listen at all to the fifteen years of silence?

In addition, the *Selected* goes with a much narrower page than either volume of *Ground Work*, chopping the ends of many lines, their last words dropped underneath into brackets. In certain pieces, such as "Before the Judgment: Passages 35," in which Duncan returns to the wizard power of his Vietnam *Passages*, this mocks the entire page he had so carefully prepared nearly ten years before. All notations for the poem as spoken text have vanished.

"The visual details of language informed Duncan's poetry," states Bertholf's Preface with blithe innocence. The only instance where he edges close to acknowledging Duncan's twenty-year experiment with how the poem appears on the page.

Putting Duncan's typewritten text of *Ground Work* into a conventionally typeset format, and breaking up his exactingly prepared spacings, might have some justification—largely commercial—were it accompanied by an honest editorial note making clear that these are not "definitive readings," and that certain exigencies of publishing ("the need of the press") had required suppression of the poet's arts. No such apology or explanation appears in the *Selected Poems*.

You don't need to understand Duncan's neoplatonic or Blake-like premises about Authors that dwell behind the poem to acknowledge that something has been terribly disturbed here—maybe desecrated's the word—or to rage at how Shopkeeper Mind dominates our age. This is a volume that seems decidedly retrograde, as though we were to accept a republication of Emily Dickinson with Mabel Loomis Todd's squeamish punctuation restored. Restored because the book's cheaper to print that way, or more unsettlingly, because that's how the educated middle class expects their literature served them. Which lends something sad and baffling to the way Bertholf's preface states, "Duncan insisted on the value of the poem. . . ."

Duncan, 1974: *was it not the very mode we saw operative thruout the system, from the state to the classroom ? the mode of the sell?*

—ANDREW SCHELLING

Memorial for Two Algerian Poets

Our eyes are fixed on the TV screen of the New York Times Op-Ed page, transfixed & horrified, emptied & blinded by what is happening in ex-Yugoslavia, in the ex-Soviet Union & its ex-satellites, that is, as usual, in ex-Europe & its ex-tensions. Blinded thus, we know little, if anything, about what is happening—*the horror, the horror,* to use a famous fictional European's dying words—in other parts of the world, & the media is certainly not going to deal with it unless it has some kind of marketable Euro-American angle. The quasi-civil war in Algeria, for example, is going largely unreported, except when a few weeks ago the ex-FIS (the outlawed fundamentalist Islamic party which, having more or less won the democratic elections a year ago, was sidelined by the FLN, the corrupt ex-revolutionary party that has been in power since independence in 1962, on which it has declared war) stated that to hasten its purification of the country it would kill all foreigners in Algeria (twenty-four were killed by the end of December). Dozens of Algerians are being killed daily on both sides. The FIS's assassination strategy is simple: kill off the intelligentsia & anybody else able to voice any intelligent opposition—or at least enough of them as gorily as possible to make the rest shut up or leave the country for fear of dying. Among the many killed this past year were two poets: Tahar Djaout, who was shot May 26 and Youssef Sebti, who was knifed to death on December 28 as he was going to his job teaching sociology in a college of agronomy in the suburbs of Algiers. They were killed because they were, quietly and seriously, going about their business as writers & would not shut up, but kept writing & saying what needs to be said: that totalitarianism under any guise, religious or military, is the ultimate evil. In an eerie, prophetic mood, Tahar Djaout, more than twenty years ago, wrote a poem that celebrated the independence of his country, but that was simultaneously an elegy for the writer Mouloud Feraoun who had been assassinated towards the end of the war of independence in not dissimilar circumstances & for not dissimilar reasons:

March 15, 1962

how to curb their rage to dissolve the stars
and to birth eternal night
I challenge their iron
and the enraged ire with which they multiply the chains

in the blue smile
of the Admiralty open on the promises

today in long swallows I gulp
—sun thundering over Algiers—
the joys of a feasting
where resurrected dawns gambol
and yet I think on the holocausts
unleashed to make dawn break
I think of Feraoun
—smile frozen in the sun's circumcision

they are afraid of the truth
they are afraid of the straight pen
they are afraid of truly human humans
and you, Mouloud, you insisted and spoke
about wheat fields for the sons of the poor
and spoke of pulverizing all the barbed wire
that lacerated our horizons

they speak of you and say that you were too good
that you felt revolted
hearing shells greet each dawn
that you believed human beings to be born so as to be brothers
and though challenging all the orgies of horror
you were incapable of hatred

one day, Mouloud, goodness finally triumphed
and we could wear the sun's trident
and we could honor the memory of the dead
because
    with
        your hands, those gleaners of dawn's mysteries,
and your dreamy inveterate poet's face,
you have known how to fulfill our truths
written in sun scraps
on the breasts of all those who revolt

—PIERRE JORIS

Santiago de Chile and La Paz, Bolivia, have in common an urban silence. A traffic jam in La Paz is the very image of chaos: thousands of cars, buses, and trucks bumping into each other as they move forward in slow motion, their fierce competition for space leaving unlikely channels through which hundreds of children and adults dash, risking their necks to cross the street—and in all that contained violence which lasts for hours no one exchanges a shout or an insult. Everything in silence, as if all those present were gauging themselves by observing their own anger.

Santiago's Paseo Ahumada (Smoky Walk) is the center, the pedestrian street that borders Chile's "City" or Wall Street, where hundreds of beggars and street vendors, thieves and policemen, vagrants and passersby swarm. Everything in this vast human profusion takes place in silence or in a low voice, without calling attention to itself. Footsteps and whispers are audible in the general silence, as if we were in a quiet little town and not a great city.

Smog completely covers Santiago's sky. The hills and their eternal snows cannot be seen. The city wants to forget its location in the Andes and imagine itself in its own virtual reality. Santiago is faxing itself into another dimension, and every neighborhood no matter how miserable has its mall. Shantytown Mall: a Chilean invention.

The public telephones in the kiosks on the Avenida Prado in La Paz are covered by a bit of crochet that envelops them like a multicolored glove. Are the people of the city trying to protect communication as they protect their religious offerings, by wrapping them in a small piece of cloth? Or is an Aymara hand enclosing and integrating the technology into its own vital style?

The airport in Arica, the border city that unites and separates Chile, Peru and Bolivia, lies out in the desert, next to the sea, in the mouth of a dry river, an ancient passage used by llama caravans going from Tiwanaku to the sea, from Titicaca to the valley where piles of stones, hillside geoglyphs, were large signs announcing to them, "this land is ours, it is occupied." Abstract men with great sacks of shellfish on their backs, accompanied by stars and suns. From the air, suspicious hollows can be seen in the desert—tombs opened by looters? *Huacas* holding mummies ten thousand years old? The airport is a meager construction, with awnings made of *quincha*, the same millinery thatching used in the tombs. But the garden is colonial: palm trees from the Canary Islands replace the native species, roses and carnations instead of *quiscos* and *chaguales*. Every Aymara who boards the plane is dressed in Western clothes. In flashes, I remember other desert towns: Calama, a little further south. A town that is

a perfect film set of three or four buildings surrounded by immensity. Two or three central streets in which Toyotas and Nissans form an incredible traffic jam four blocks long. In those few blocks, the Aymara girls make their way from one building to another, perfectly outfitted in their tailored suits and high heels, as if they were in Manhattan.

And a little further, in Chuqui (Chuquicamata), the largest opencut copper mine in the world raises its smokestack of poisonous gases that darken the desert. It is the only shape visible from satellite for many miles around. In Quechua and Aymara, "Chuqui" means the glitter of copper and gold. That glitter brought foreigners here which, among other things, provoked the military coup of 1973. (Allende had nationalized the copper industry, infuriating Kissinger and Nixon. . .) Today the monument to that killing is a broken shoe, a fragment of bone, a severed finger that came to light in the desert, on the highway near Calama. By those fragments it was known that the mangled bodies of the intellectuals and leaders assassinated by the military in 1973 were there. They blew them up with dynamite so there would be no memory of their death, but the whole desert is memory, tombs and *huacas* of then and now.

In La Paz, perpetual protest rallies that no one appears to pay any attention to. The workers crucify themselves, tying themselves to posts, antennae, flagpoles. Men and women crucified on the roof of the university, in the main avenue, silhouetted against Illimani, the sacred mountain of La Paz.

Their bodies at once subvert and affirm an Andean version of Christianity, as if they were saying "Christ isn't the only one." They corroborate the image Merton used when he said of the Zapotecs, "The people itself is its own god."

To arrive at Lake Titicaca is to arrive at the center of the Aymara world. Spanish is no longer spoken, except in the schools, which are Bolivian, or when a foreigner comes to visit. In the pitch-dark yet translucent waters there is still no trash. Poverty recycles and reuses everything. In the island towns they listen to Aymara radio stations. Andean songs and fiestas on the radio! (There can't be many places in the world, I thought, where people would rather listen to their own songs than to North American music.) In the islands, hundreds of children playing in Aymara, pre-Colombian and contemporary games. Serpentine labyrinths carved into the earth and soccer games at six thousand feet above sea level. The girls tie themselves up in cords and woolen fabrics, making geometric shapes with the tension of their bodies.

Two boys of around eleven offered to take me to the top of a mountain to see the Inca altar. We walked quickly to get there before sunrise. The boys sang Aymara erotic songs, laughing and enjoying themselves because they thought I didn't understand. When I started to laugh they began to

wonder and switched to Spanish, singing songs learned in school, patriotic hymns against Chile. They ask me point-blank: Why did Chile steal the sea from Bolivia? "Greed," I tell them.

Poetry travels underground in La Paz, secret as Leonardo García Pabón's "Los Rios Subterráneos," the poem of the fountains of water that erupt with the torrential rains, dragging down whole neighborhoods of miserable houses. Landslides and avalanches that become other hills where other miserable neighborhoods will grow up. The books of Jaime Saenz, Oscar Cerruto, Pedro Shimose and Eduardo Mitre are as difficult to find in bookstores as those of Blanca Wietuchter, but they travel from hand to hand and are more present and have more reality than any other language or rhetoric in the city.

In Santiago and La Paz, the media are transvestites of colonial "reality." They are continually converting it (translating it) into the terms used by the press in the northern hemisphere, into its names and categories, into a language that is imagined to be "the language of the West." The effect this produces is one of irreality, as if we were reading a version of events that is beyond the control or the experience of ordinary citizens. And that is the key: to present a "superreality" (especially on television) to which the natives aspire as if it were a mental Eldorado. The children, hypnotized by this irreality, prefer it and imitate it, using it to create a language that is yet another version.

But poetry exists in the tension between two or more languages. A single line by Saenz or Cerruto in La Paz, or by Elvira Hernández in Santiago, plays with this irreality, taking it apart.

You have to have spent a whole morning watching the Choqueyapu rushing towards Illimani at full speed with its cargo of garbage to understand the brilliance of one line of Cerruto. You have to have seen the tons of garbage produced by Chilean consumerism to appreciate a line of E. Hernández's "Santiago Waria."

Still, in Santiago poetry is everywhere, it flows above ground. It's in the newspapers, on the radio and television. Thousands of people recently congregated at the new funeral for Pablo Neruda, whose remains were at last moved to his house on Isla Negra, facing the sea. (Just as, years before, thousands had gathered for the funerals of Violeta Parra and Gabriela Mistral. In Chile, the power of poets is measured by the size of their funerals.) But the presence of poetry in the media is double-edged: it is used to exalt a poet like Gabriela Mistral and to sell underwear by invoking her name. Although hundreds of people throng to listen to Gonzalo Rojas or Nicanor Parra, and every year there are several "international poetry encounters," the new currents are as subterranean and little-known in Santiago as in La Paz. Poetry is becoming a marginal phenomenon, even in Chile. The new poetry written in Mapuche and published in small

bilingual editions (Elicura Chihuailaf and Lionel Lienlaf)) and the texts by women—Soledad Fariña, Eugenia Brito and Verónica Zondek—are equally unobtainable, perhaps to honor their identification with the underground.

—CECILIA VICUÑA
[Tr. from the Spanish by Esther Allen]

Vallejo in Paris: The Poet as Journalist

When César Vallejo left Peru for Paris in 1923 he was thirty-one years old with two books of poetry to his name. *Trilce* had appeared the year before and disconcerted critics with its stark innovations and the raw force of its language; only gradually did other poets, notably in Spain, recognize its importance. Vallejo spent fifteen years in Paris where he died, but he never published another book of poems in his lifetime.

What he did manage to publish was mostly journalism. Soon after arriving in Paris he became a correspondent for newspapers in Peru, ultimately contributing to over thirty journals in Latin America and Europe, predominantly through the 1920s. He wrote some three hundred articles and chronicles, covering social and cultural topics ranging from the Salon d'Automne and profiles of artists to fashion, sports (especially tennis), spiritism (Krishnamurti), and curiosities from the European newspapers, reflecting the habits of both Europeans and Latin Americans. His own cultural identity remained a central concern, particularly in the context of Europe, and he continued to question that relationship while engaging himself fully with the issues of his time. Eventually his long-standing preoccupation with social injustice rose to the fore and by the end of the decade it became his primary subject. Above all, this body of reportage and reflections served as his "writer's workshop," as Jorge Puccinelli points out, where Vallejo could elaborate his ideas on art and politics, while continuing to write in various genres.

Desde Europa (Lima: Ediciones Fuente de Cultura Peruana, 1987) gathers nearly all of Vallejo's articles from Paris—he also published several pieces before leaving Peru—together with numerous photos, illustrations, maps and facsimiles of letters and newspaper pages. The book represents an enormous work of scholarship that occupied Puccinelli for many years. His purpose was to reintegrate this material so that the poet's better-known

writings could be viewed in their total context. He notes Vallejo's fondness for coining words and phrases ("de una sencillez casi vegetal," "la hiena fosforosa del destino") much as in the poetry, and on at least two occasions Vallejo quotes directly from *Trilce* in his articles. At times the journalism serves as a trial run for the more creative work—the prose poem "Hallazgo de la Vida," for example, first appeared in 1926 as a slightly longer piece for a newspaper in Trujillo, the provincial capital where Vallejo had gone to school. Though critics have been aware of the journalism, Puccinelli was apparently the first to unearth the work from Vallejo's early years in Paris, written for another paper in Trujillo, the six-page daily *El Norte*, founded by the poet's friends.

Vallejo wrote his first piece the month he reached Paris, in July. His semi-regular series of three dozen chronicles for *El Norte* was called "Desde Europa," and it began with "En Montmartre," which tells of his encounter with an Andalusian on the Champs Elysées who recognizes he is from America and takes him to Montmartre to show him around. Vallejo describes how the scene there is fading and that now the action is in Montparnasse. The Andalusian insists more than once that "Europe is finished," and asks Vallejo why he's bothered to come. "I am a worker from Peru," the poet tells him. "I wanted to see the old continent."

Judging from his earliest articles, Vallejo was apparently quick to learn French. He seems hardly dazzled, however, by the vast metropolis; rather he is always ready to challenge what he sees. Describing a new production of Maeterlinck's celebrated play, *L'Oiseau bleu*, he tells how both critics and public raved, then tears it apart as garish and ridiculous. With a certain irony he comments on the new inductions at the Académie Française, an institution that repeatedly provokes his amusement. When he writes on the popular Montparnasse café La Rotonde, a spot that he frequented, he is impressed by its company—the Japanese painter Foujita, an actress from Pitoëff's theater, Enrique Gómez Carrillo along with Maeterlinck, as well as Tzara and "the whole dadaist squad"—and yet he has fun with it. But he makes his first serious charge late in 1923, in "Cooperación," where he tells of a Peruvian evening at a Paris theater, with a lecture on the Incas, poetry readings (including himself and José Santos Chocano, of the previous generation), a concert, and a talk by the Peruvian minister to France. The entire Peruvian colony attends, to share their culture with the French, and Vallejo laments: "Solidarity? Understanding? Nothing of the sort exists in Europe with respect to Latin America. We offer our hearts to Europe. . .and Europe responds with silence and a premeditated deafness." Why does Europe scorn us, fear us, remain ignorant of us, he asks, warning that recognition must come: "We the barbarians are here!"

His columns for *El Norte* averaged once a month through the end of 1924, and that year half were devoted to sketches of older Latin American

writer/diplomats whom he visited in Paris. Among these were two chroniclers active since the turn of the century, with strong ties to the French literary establishment: Gómez Carrillo, the Guatemalan writer who had been friendly with Rubén Darío and was perhaps the most translated in his time, and Ventura García Calderón, one of four brothers from a conservative Peruvian family who had all moved to Paris; Francisco García Calderón, the essayist, was profiled as well by Vallejo. He also wrote on the Ecuadorian critic Gonzalo Zaldumbide, the Bolivian Alcides Arguedas, and the Uruguayan Hugo Barbagelata, editor of *L'Amérique Latine*, a short-lived journal in French and Spanish. Vallejo had contributed an essay there on new Peruvian writers, in which he showed a keen sense of the problems confronting his generation, who were digesting a full range of foreign influences even as they produced "substantial works that are genuinely South American."

In other pieces of the time Vallejo comments on the incredible resourcefulness of French vanity, another recurring theme—how every instinct and institution is geared toward vaunting French achievements. The urge to publicize the national glory is second nature: "The moment a French person feels or dreams anything important, they leap into the street right away with it" ("Réclame de culture"). In "Las Mujeres de Paris" he notes that for a "new worlder" visiting Paris what strikes him above all is the scarcity of children. The low birth rate in France then brings him to consider the "strange impression of sterility" in the women he sees, with their cold grins, and how perhaps they become denatured by sharing the same workaday struggles as men.

Journalism was Vallejo's main source of income in Paris, but the newspapers often did not pay promptly—through the years he sometimes had to borrow money from friends. Not until 1925 did he begin to find enough work, when the Lima journal *Mundial* hired him to write a monthly column, which became his most extensive collaboration. In 1926 he was contributing as well to *Variedades*, also of Lima, and for the next several years he was turning out articles on a weekly basis. The larger audiences for these publications enabled him to write pieces that were longer and more wide-ranging. Puccinelli points to a shift in style with this new work: whereas in the first years Vallejo kept in mind the earlier *cronistas* like Gómez Carrillo, seeking *le mot rare* in his use of language, reviving archaic words, now he sought the precision of *le mot juste* to render his language more powerful, taking as a prime example the work of Joseph Conrad.

Besides the increased outlets for his articles, Vallejo's situation grew a bit more secure in 1925 for other reasons. That spring he became secretary at the office of Lee Grands Journaux Ibéro-Américains, a new press agency set up to facilitate contacts between Latin America and Europe. For six months prior to its opening he had campaigned for a job from its founder,

the Argentine writer Alejandro Sux (back in 1912 Sux had helped found *Mundial Magazine* in Paris, not to be confused with the later Peruvian journal, and proposed Rubén Darío as its editor). Despite the grand designs of the enterprise, which Vallejo announced in his first piece for *Mundial*, the work was not as steady as he had hoped. Mostly it consisted of running the office, but operations seldom ran smoothly; for his own reasons—his health, on one occasion, plus more promising commitments—Vallejo took several brief leaves of absence before resigning two years later. In October of 1925 he also began receiving a small monthly stipend for a few years from the Spanish government—thanks to the persistent efforts of his friend Pablo Abril de Vivero, the Peruvian poet and diplomat based in Madrid. Ostensibly the grant was for Vallejo to finish his law studies in Madrid, abandoned earlier in Peru: all he did was take the train there every month or two to pick up his check.

The following year he was involved in founding a couple of publications as well. *La Semaine Parisienne* never got past the planning stages, but Vallejo devoted a number of letters to the subject in his extensive correspondence with Abril. Together they intended to start a twelve-page weekly and hoped to attract an impressive list of contributors among French and Latin American writers; he wrote to Abril that Montherlant would give an article for the first issue. Vallejo even went so far as to quit his job temporarily at Les Grands Journaux and to open an office for the new journal, but without money he couldn't advance the project. Meanwhile his friend Juan Larrea, the Spanish poet, launched a small literary journal, *Favorables París Poema*, in which Vallejo took part distributing hundreds of copies. He contributed a couple of brief texts about poetry—"Poesía Nueva" and "Se prohibe hablar al piloto" ("A poem is a vital entity that is much more organic than an organic being in nature. . .if you amputate a line, a word, a letter, a written sign from a poem, it dies. . .")—but the journal folded after two issues.

Vallejo seemed to truly enjoy stretching out in his longer chronicles, linking together the most unlikely elements till the end might be anyone's guess. He remained constantly aware of the social undercurrents of events and cast an ironic glance at politicians and those who thought themselves in control. In "Crónica de París" from 1925 he begins by questioning the sources of liberalism, arguing rather for eastern philosophies which spread their wisdom by way of a certain intolerance and a sacred sectarian passion. He then shifts to the story of Chinese students in Paris uniting in solidarity with striking workers in Shanghai, while pointing up the harsh conditions at the Shanghai mills belonging to French and English companies. The piece moves on to tell of the aristocracies of fashion in a gala evening at the Grand Palais, mysterious threats against the event, the ploys of publicity-seeking industrialists, and more, ending finally in an account of

the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen whose plane got lost at the North Pole: from every corner the questions multiplied, what happened to him, till some days later he returned alive and indeed nothing at all had happened to him.

Fashion amused him to no end, there in the capital of fashion—for its inherent folly and the lengths to which people will go to follow its call. In "El verano en Deauville," also from 1925, he describes how the seaside resort is in vogue because of the Parisian artists who reign there. Their dress that season then brings to mind a long episode about an escaped leopard in the Bois de Boulogne near Paris, how the whole city is caught up in the madcap chase for days, when at last it is found and shot, leading to protests and, immediately, the fashion for leopard-skin shoes. By the fall it becomes transformed into the Leopard Dance at the Moulin Rouge.

"Brilliant and cruel city" he calls Paris in the same piece, for it has failed to appreciate the work of George Bernard Shaw, who in turn is quoted for his remarks on the city's intense provincialism. Later that year he returns to his defense of Shaw—French critics consider Pirandello the better playwright, but Vallejo judges him more a technical innovator while Shaw clearly "possesses a humanism lacking in the other writer" ("La conquista de París por los negros"). To the end, despite his increasing political engagement, Vallejo will remain too much the humanist to let his esthetic judgments fall under the complete sway of Marxist dogma.

As for his attention to the stage, beyond its interest as a subject for his columns, Vallejo showed an ongoing concern with theater from his perspective as a writer. He chides the French for producing mostly mediocre work, and for knowing nothing of new Russian or German theater. He considers Cocteau essentially a fake, and when his "Orphée" opens in 1926, Vallejo writes: "At heart Cocteau is a conservative, in spite of his efforts and modernist poses. His attitudes are based on makeup; his acrobatics are clownish, that is, false. Inside, sleep the old spirit and substance. . .in truth, he is, will be, and has been, a Catholic" ("La visita de los reyes de España a París"). Three years later, reporting on theater trends, he dismisses the realism of boulevard theater, and in praising the Russians is especially excited by the plastic quality of their work; among the French, he only cares about the more innovative directors, such as Charles Dullin, Jacques Copeau, and Georges Pitoëff. It was in the path of their work that he hoped to go with the several plays he started writing at the end of the decade, in an effort to merge his creative concerns with social and political material, to reach a broader audience. For a moment Dullin was interested, and García Lorca tried to help get him a production in Madrid. He had thought at least to make some money from this work, but he never saw any of his plays produced. Late in his life he even wrote film scripts from two of his plays, yet nothing happened with these either.

Vallejo wrote intermittently on film, and he was especially fond of Chaplin. "Religiones de vanguardia," early in 1927, recounts the ongoing debate among intellectuals and the public about whether or not cinema exists as an art in its own right. Though he clearly thinks so, he rules out the opinions of writers, actors, directors, as "lacking authority. . .It is very difficult to be this and that, artist and man, at the same time. A man who is an artist can no longer do or say anything connected with art except as an artist. A poet will judge a poem, not as a simple mortal, but as a poet and the same with filmmakers." The following year he devotes an entire piece to Chaplin ("La pasión de Charles Chaplin"). Describing *The Gold Rush* he writes that "the actor, as in none of his other films, is totally absorbed by the character. Good night, señor Pirandello. . ." Moreover, the work marks an ideal synthesis of art and politics: "this film makes the best demand for social justice that any postwar art has been capable of till now." Several months later, he cites Chaplin's comic genius with the mirror scene in *The Circus* as achieving by much simpler means the sort of rhythmic density that Abel Gance attempted with his grand experiment using three screens ("Ensayo de una rítmica en tres pantallas"). Vallejo does not find much beauty in *Napoleon:* "Gance made a film that is cinematically banal, harnessed with brilliant historical reconstructions."

Vallejo wrote more often on art than on cinema. Puccinelli even draws the parallel with Baudelaire, pointing not only to Vallejo's prose poems but also to his "Salons." A small collection could be drawn from these pieces alone, in which he displays a continual curiosity with the artistic questions of his day: "Salón de Otoño," 1923; "Salón de las Tullerías de París," 1924; "El Salón de Otoño de París," 1925; "Picasso or the easy job of the hero," 1927; "Madness in art," 1927; "Juan Gris or the Pythagoras of painting," 1928; "New artistic currents of Spain," 1928; "Latest artistic news from Paris," 1929; "The creators of indo-american painting," 1929; "Tendencies of modern sculpture: the sculptor Fioravanti," 1935; "Man and God in Inca sculpture," 1936. He knew many artists as well: through Larrea he became friendly with Vicente Huidobro, who in turn introduced him to Juan Gris, Picasso, Jacques Lipschitz, and Erik Satie.

Despite his total immersion in Paris, as shown by all the journalistic writing, Vallejo did nonetheless miss his roots. His first trip to Spain, to pick up his stipend late in 1925, awoke a sort of nostalgia in him for a part of his cultural origins. "Without doubt, I am going to my native land," he writes. "I am returning to my Spanish America, reincarnated—by love of the word that spans distances—in Castillian soil, seven times nailed with the nails of all the colonial adventures." On the way there, he stops in Basque country, grateful for his brief respite from the city: "What a pleasure it is to get lost for lack of roads," whereas in the city "I go out to the street and there is street; I take to thinking and there is always thought. But now,

no. . .Ah, my dear Vicente Huidobro, I can't ever agree with the excessive importance you give to the mind in life. My votes are always for feeling." When he reaches Madrid he finds that it is "the most original city in Europe," due to the Pyrenees which protect Spain from the anxiety of progress that besets Paris ("Entre Francia y España"). Vallejo returned to Madrid many times in subsequent years, but its charm for him was even more problematic than Paris. He eventually spent fourteen busy months there in 1930-32, after being kicked out of France for his political activities, yet when he had the chance to return to Paris it came none too soon. He wrote to Larrea a month before arriving back in France: "It's unbearable living here in Madrid. If you're passing through, it may be fine and even enchanting. But to do anything and to live, it's impossible."

In his articles Vallejo often bemoaned the "velocity" of Paris, its obsessive devouring of the new. Worse, due to France's debt to Wall Street, the capital was ceding its place as center of the world to New York. That meant it might take its lead from the United States, a country he decried for its utterly competitive society, its "matchismo" as he termed it in "La Vida Como Match." Still, he appreciated the unique quality of Paris, especially where foreigners were concerned. In effect, Paris contains all the other great Western cities, he writes late in 1926, but where others, such as Buenos Aires, may be a "cosmopolis," Paris is really a "cosmic city": there the colonies of foreigners don't remain simply what they are, rather "they lose their social physiognomy and become Parisian. That is, they adopt the social rhythm of Paris. . .they come not to get rich or amuse themselves a while, but to live more widely and nobly, they come to stay" ("El crepúsculo de las águiles").

That some of the natives should feel overwhelmed amid all the strange tongues seemed understandable to him, though the extreme responses of French pride could not be taken seriously: "There are places in the big city where French is heard in such short supply that one would think it a shy foreign tongue. . .Already one newspaper has insinuated that the government should strictly prohibit any but the national language to be spoken in France." To which he concludes, "It always comes down to choosing, in language as in politics, between the Nation and the International" ("Desde París. La confusión de las lenguas").

Despite his internationalism Vallejo does not lose track of his own cultural origins, nor does he believe that the ultimate goal is to be taken for a European. Responding to the French tendency to claim as much as possible for the national glory (one Frenchman, he notes, even claims that jazz originated there), he counters by reclaiming a part of Paul Gauguin for Peru, whose mother was Peruvian; the painter spent part of his childhood there, and his work always bore its traces. But Vallejo is not trading in national vanities. Rather he chides many of his fellow Latin American artists

precisely for getting it wrong in their relations with Europe, in pretending to be what they are not and not what they are.

He pursues this discourse through various articles, between 1926 and 1928 especially. "I lift my voice and accuse my generation of being impotent to create or to realize its own spirit," he writes ("Contra el secreto profesional"). He describes two classes of Latin American intellectuals in Paris, the official and the nonofficial ones, himself among the latter, and that "we have produced very insignificant things under the cultural aegis of Europe." He proposes instead "works that are rigorously indo-american and pre-columbian," insisting that American folklore, Aztec and Inca in particular, holds revelations for European culture ("Una gran reunión latinoamericana"). Like the people of the orient, "we too have lost our soul and we've lost it for Europe. Because in Latin America the Europeans have ruined everything for us, philosophies, religions, industries, arts. . .since Columbus' arrival there is a terrible emptiness in our life" ("Oriente y Occidente").

On the other hand, Vallejo suggests that most Latin Americans who come to Europe don't stay long enough to really see the changes in the postwar era, or they remain too insulated within their own communities to notice. In Paris there is a new sense of order and method, and he points to the importance of clocks—this is a theme that he returns to often, the legislation of time in an accelerated world. Moreover, the bohemian and anarchist characters from the previous epoch have disappeared ("Las nuevas disciplinas"). He remarks that Latin Americans are often disappointed when they arrive, they claim that Paris is just like home: "We South Americans seem more Parisian (in our ways) than the French themselves who come from the provinces. . .To such a degree has Latin America been culturally and socially colonized by Paris" ("Sociedades coloniales"). By the end of 1928, after the first of his three trips to the Soviet Union, he feels more than ever the need for a new decolonized consciousness. "We have not created anything," he writes. "We haven't even tried. . .When young American intellectuals come to Europe, they don't come to honestly study foreign life and culture, but to 'triumph.' They carry in their suitcases some books or canvases made in America, and barely do they arrive in Paris, no other desire moves them than to 'triumph'" ("La juventud de América en Europa"). Vallejo, by contrast, did come to study, to inquire and criticize, and to put himself in question.

He understood this disadvantaged relationship for Latin America, regarding Europe, all the more in its political sense. In one of his occasional reports on the League of Nations, "Ginebra y las pequeñas naciones," he comments ironically how the League is concerned that various Latin American countries owe it a lot of money: "So that's what it's good for: to collect. It knows no other way to help humanity than the modern benefit

of being a creditor. . .What other ties are there, in effect, between the League of Nations and Nicaragua, but those of creditor and debtor?" In a later piece, discussing the weakness of Latin American diplomacy in representing the problems abroad, he concludes: "What Europe is unaware of is that the indigenous race constitutes. . .the only barrier that is more or less active against all foreign imperialism in Latin America" ("La diplomacía latinoamericana").

During this time Vallejo increasingly wondered how to reconcile his political preoccupations with his work as an artist. In 1926, reflecting on Victor Hugo's books, he asserts that their effect was due largely to their political value. If, instead of all his public activity, "Hugo had closed himself in his room like Mallarmé, he wouldn't have reached the universal influence he had. . .Essentially, the work of Victor Hugo is that of a political ideologue and not of a poet." And he calls Hugo's "an easy and cheap way to become a 'great poet'" ("El poeta y el politico. El caso Victor Hugo"). The following year he begins to address what he sees as the social responsibility of the artist, whose neutrality and lack of political sensitivity would rather seem to prove "human mediocrity and esthetic inferiority. But in what sphere should the artist act politically?. . .Above all, he must awaken a new political sensitivity in man. . .and engender new concerns and civic emotions." But contrary to Diego Rivera, who at the time favored an art more closely tied to ideology, Vallejo emphasizes that an artist is a free being who works independently of political programs ("Los artistes ante la política").

By this point in his life Vallejo was beginning to feel ashamed of still living off grants, and he was quite fed up at seeing his literary efforts not amount to much: as with most of his fiction, he couldn't find a publisher for his novella of Peruvian folklore, *Hacia el reino de los sciris.* The day he left for his trip to the Soviet Union in October 1928, financed with a grant from the Peruvian government meant for his return home, he wrote to Pablo Abril that he was anxious about his future, and that "I still have not found my path" in life. He hoped perhaps to stay in Russia, and seemed certain that "in Paris I shall never achieve anything." Yet within two weeks he was on his way back, due not to the cold that he feared but to the language problem. He was greatly excited by the new society he saw, and managed at least to make some contacts to write for newspapers there. More and more he devoted himself to Marxist studies. His old friend José Carlos Mariátegui had recently founded the Communist Party in Peru—and was eventually jailed—while Vallejo frequented these circles with other Peruvians in Paris. Due to his increased political commitment, though, his most regular journals, *Mundial* and *Variedades*, began to balk at the militant tone of his articles and by the end of 1930 he ceased working for them.

That year, in "Autopsia del superrealismo," written after the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," he criticizes André Breton for being "a scholastic ideologue, an armchair rebel. . .Breton forgets that there is only one revolution, the proletarian, and that the workers will make this revolution with action, not the intellectuals with their 'crisis of consciousness.'" For Vallejo, surrealism's brief fling with Marxism constituted its one truly revolutionary dimension, and its failure to stick to that was a sign of its essentially bourgeois nature. Though it sounds as if he may have at last succumbed, Vallejo couldn't be a Party hack if he tried. He considered Mayakovsky pathetic, "a buffoon," for abandoning the futurism of his youth in a feeble effort to remake himself into a revolutionary poet. Mayakovsky's life and literature couldn't be more divided, as he became lost in trying to readjust to the new social reality ("Un reportaje en Rusia VI: Vladimiro Maiakovsky").

His article on the poet was one of ten that Vallejo wrote about Russia for Abril's new journal in Madrid, *Bolívar*. The pieces were subsequently published as part of *Rusia en 1931*, which quickly went into three printings. It was among his only published books since living in Europe, along with *Tungsten*, his proletarian novel—a tale of suffering indigenous masses and labor organizing in the mines of Peru—which came out in 1931 and also enjoyed some success; the second edition of *Trilce* had been published in Spain, in 1930. Not that they relieved his chronic penury much. Despite some translation work during his stay in Spain (two novels by Marcel Aymé and one by Henri Barbusse), he was unable to publish most of his other writing, except for a few poems in magazines.

His journalistic work dwindled nearly to a halt after that, and he wrote no other pieces on Russia. Of the fifteen articles that he produced until his death in 1938, most were devoted to Peru, especially to Inca art and culture, for European and other Latin American publications. The Marxist tone of his language has largely subsided in these pieces, in favor of more esthetic and historical terms. It was like a final return for Vallejo—intellectually if not physically—to his indo-american core, which had always made up the substance of his fiction.

The few articles of his last year, by contrast, arose out of his anti-imperialist and antifascist stance, in that they were entirely caught up with the Spanish Civil War. When the war broke out in 1936, Vallejo's activism grew particularly focused: he collected funds for the republican cause, attended meetings, denounced nonintervention in his articles, and at the end of the year he even went to Spain for a few weeks to try to help firsthand. In spite of his difficult circumstances, he went back the following year to represent Peru at the International Congress of Antifascist Writers, where he delivered a talk on "The Responsibility of the Writer." This was

the time for his last rush of poems. In the final six months of his life, it appears, he wrote more poetry than he had through all the years in Paris.

—JASON WEISS

Noticings

When New Time Folds Up by Kathleen Fraser is a physically and emotionally beautiful book from Chax Press, 1993. The twelfth book from an author whose cultural nuance is subtle and intense, it is an Italian book, wherein Fraser tracks the traces of what was once fresh and alive in time, what has been corrupted by turning it into "Power," "Mastery," "Culture," and "Art." One long poem, a *tour de force* called "Giotto: Arena," is a serious and witty examination of knowing and noticing, of focus and address in the making of art works, not just formalist, traditional knowing, but investments in objective, yet quirky fact (mauve socks on shepherds), and missteps to the side, little confusions or errors pursued. Thus the book is full of charm—of song and spells, of the magical and incantatory revivification of the past, even of one or two "amulet" lines ("Porcelain light opens") all of which exert the charm of fascination and allure.

The first of these four serial poems is called "Etruscan Pages" and to some degree treats tombs, meltdowns of art works, losses of all kinds. Yet the work is Eleusinian, not elegiac, as it is about freshness, texture, color and liveliness renascent, not ever totally destroyed. Indeed, this is the poetics: "inscribed with the hidden/ particularly of one still alive." Or

> of the places we longed for
> where the dead lived under us
>
> in their little painted houses
> gazing at yellow walls
>
> episodic, chromatic

This poem is especially about the women, cultural carriers when alive ("Rome sends young men to Etruscan women/ for wisdom") and dead (the

so-called Zagreb Mummy was wrapped in a shroud covered with Etruscan writing). Most thrilling are the little traces of articulate presence—how an Etruscan woman scratched Etruscan names for a Greek story on her bronze mirror, translating. The work in the book as a whole is sensational, for "Death imagines us into pleasure": pleasures of food ("roast little pigs for weddings"), yearnings ("we were suddenly hungry"), desire for a certain taste ("funghi porcini"), sexual happiness and lust ("holding the lamp/ to shine on// her lover's curiosity"), precisions of color ("Mulberry smeared clover/ covers an entire field").

The key aspect and mystery of the Etruscans is still their language which we know mainly visually and sensually. ("we know what each mark is equal to/ but not, in retrospect, what was intended") In Fraser's work, glyphs of Etruscan letters and words play a role in her page space arrangements, and the Etruscan persons seem, by dying, to have entered under the lintel of their own alphabet to be made manifest in letters by the poem. Fraser makes her own associative reading or "dictionary" of some of these Etruscan glyphs. Fraser's mix or pursuit of two Anglo-American female modernists has inflected this book—H.D. for the pensive, illuminating reading and rereading of signs (a play with repetition and recirculation most striking in the final, and title poem). And Woolf for the delicate, determined "deliberate burdens through the temporal." One of the Woolfean marks in the Etruscan poem is the inclusion of personal letters to a variety of friends, a textual choice that enriches the one "narrated" journey to Tarquinia with the multiple journeys and multi-pronged crossings that texture any person's life in our sustaining communities. Space, tonalities, color, precision of emotional nuance; Fraser's work has always offered the rich tinctures of multifarious webbings.

In Cecilia Vicuña's book *Unravelling Words & the Weaving of Water*, "Pleasure is prayer," and the spiritual and earthbound forces join and mingle in an art work at once visual, performative, poetic, and ethical. (Translated by Eliot Weinberger and Suzanne Jill Levine, and introduced with an evocative essay by Weinberger; Graywolf Press, 1992.) The book contains, first of all, photographic records of site specific political-ritual performances, such as the stunning spilled glass of milk, commemorating the child-victims of contaminated milk (Colombia, 1979) and confronting the viewers with its witness. The book has a midsection containing a rich notebook, or day book of philosophers, mythmakers, students of ritual, etymology, and the earth. The works in poetry engage nature as it turns into words with a webbing of etymological practices in Indo-European languages like English and Spanish, and in Quechua. The poetics: of debris, of an interplay between smallness and vastness, and of compromised hope seems appealing because powerfully accurate, "Shine again/ little waif." Beginning with an empty string, unknotted, as "the quipu that remembers

nothing," Vicuña has worked on historical, cultural, and ecological memory to create a striking oeuvre of politics and myth, not so much an auto-mythology (with all this implies of self-centeredness), as a social act of shamanist practice, so that the elements of earth speak through her, mourning their compromise, and standing up, as best they can, to destruction, by virtue of "the vital force within the woolly animals themselves."

The final section of the book is a poem group called "La Wik' uña" (in Quechua), to commemorate and explore the woolly animal whose Spanish name Vicuña bears. Webbing and weaving is a central metaphor, but the real basis of this work is its elegant, principled tracing of the metamorphoses of matter: light to feathers and arcs, hummingbirds to dream, the vicuña made talismanically manifest, running within the dream, the foxes as linked predators and friends, the threads woven from vicuña into a cloth that becomes both prayer and poetry, language itself as a sacred thread, thread as a stream, and a metamorphic return to natural facts—stream, earth, clouds, fog, smoke and buds, and, finally, Vicuña's investiture as the performer of these transformations and endurances. This is serious, nourishing work.

Smaro Kamboureli offers the term "conceptive poems" for one type of the long poems considered in her intelligent book *On the Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem* (University of Toronto Press, 1991). A "conceptive poem" is "a poetry of ideas" which occurs through "acts of critical reading" both of other thinkers, and of oneself. "The long poem, then, is a rereading of writings, a rewriting of readings." The term "conceptive poem" is helpful in thinking about a number of contemporary long poem writers—Dahlen and Silliman among them. It also fits Rosmarie Waldrop's long work in both her *A Form/ Of Taking/ It All* (1990, Station Hill Press, dubbed a novel) and in her *Lawn of Extended Middle* (Tender Buttons, 1993, not exactly a long poem but a book-length serial arrangement of prose poems). This "lawn" is the site of an intense, wary game, which undoes a "venerable old law of logic. . .that everything must be either true or false." The "game" in the first part of the book is intellectual, in the second it is sexual end ethical. The book is poignant and brave, committed to "the desire to explore my body's labyrinth" without flinching at varieties of ambivalence. She finds she is the site of a number of struggles with emptiness and fullness as simultaneous states, A and Not-A at once, the self and the gap or distance at the core of the self which makes any "I" eccentric to its own designs: "As if I had to navigate both forward and backward, part of me turned away from where I'm going. . ." This is illustrated by discussions of will and involuntary response: "What's left over if I subtract the fact that my leg goes up from the fact that I raise it?" And by indications of alternative actions: "the light and shadow playing over my rush of

wildwater actions while I feel I'm sitting motionless on the bank." The book is also as if an X-ray of a novel about desire, possibility, fulfillment, resistance, and the ambiguities of love ("The gravity of love encompasses ambivalence.").

Ann Lauterbach, like the other poets I have briefly noted here, may be framed as engaging with "the" meditative tradition. But Lauterbach, like Fraser, Vicuña and Waldrop, resists being "the pensive man. . .He sees that eagle float/ For which the intricate Alps are a single nest." (This from Wallace Stevens.) It is not that the world and mind-encompassing scope are beyond these writers, but that critical shifts of scale and positionality have occurred which alter our notions of genre, sound, and cultural address. In Lauterbach's *Clamor* (Viking Penguin, 1991), the meditative figure is saturated, dissolving, liminal, errant—indeed, she is not only a woman or female figure (as in the books considered above), she is here "a girl." The pensive "girl"—what does she see? "Girl" is a strange dot, recurrent, vulnerable, resilient, intelligent, committed to remembrance and exploration. Like the loon in Thoreau's *Walden,* she comes up in different parts of the lake at different times. When she comes up, she cries, and when she is under, she weeps. For the poems in *Clamor* are facets of one unimaginable elegy—during which imagination itself is immeasurably taxed. Lauterbach makes elegy like pilgrimage, like epistle, like quest; elegy paradoxically filled like a cornucopia, for "abundance and loss are the terms." And these terms occur simultaneously, intermingled, illuminating and stressing the other—which is a motif which binds the four books here.

—RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

If It Were Christa Wolf

Of all the organisms on earth, only bacteria are individuals.
Lynn Margulis

a young poet puts himself the subjects together
Johannes Becher

I with German tongue
this cloud around me
that I keep as house
drive through all tongues
Ingeborg Bachmann

> Who writes about things that disturb her. A proposition of consciousness. Thought appealing to language. Feeling to thought. A composite. Little habits of time that recur. Dream or remember the disappearance of the photograph, an inquiring glance, tacit permission. Who places the photograph in a pocket.

In Christa Wolf's writing there is a constant breaking down of subject/object definition, both existing together within each other and without. What's outside what outside? Endangered world, endangered persons living in the world, can they be distinct one from the other?

A person existing within the social whole from which a person is not dividable, separable. Writing and agency. Writing is agency. Cooking is taking place.

By a succession or serial person *who* was an interaction between self-determination and the interpolation of history.

An imaginary solution is not presupposed. *Who* imagines it. *Who* misses. Agree to agree to what tools of thought. *Who* was hungry. *Who* was looking out those eyes. And the dog in the dream is also *who*.

> Young Hellwig had been witness to all this. Ever since he had begun to think independently, the camp had been there, and so had the explanation for its being. He had no other knowledge. He had still been a boy when the camp had been built. Now he was almost a youth, and it was being built once more, so to speak. (Anna Seghers, *The Seventh Cross)*

Someone escapes, "call him George this week," and this escape creates a breach, a disruption. A place opens up for questions in Hellwig's mind. Will he rebuild the camp? So to speak. *Who* give him this choice. Rebuilding is and is not literal, not the literal walls, which remain, but the mechanisms of mind that retake escaped prisoners, replace them in concentration camps.

> Imagine that he comes and I signal him a warning. What will happen to me, to us?—And then, imagine he comes and I see

him coming and I make no sign. . .. He is seized. Can one do such a thing? (Anna Seghers, *The Seventh Cross)*

Who asks.

What was pure instinct once
Is now done by rule.
Ovid

Sometimes we are looking at the notation of emotion.

Anna Seghers (1900–1983), mentor to Christa Wolf, was writing this from France, in exile, having fled Germany in 1933, after Hitler became chancellor, after the spectacle of book burning at the university in Berlin, after her books were all placed on the Nazi blacklist, after her apartment had been broken into by the police, after her neighbors had hidden her . . . . (Her daughter writes later of how the children, with the last of their money, were sent to swimming lessons, for, who knew, one day perhaps they would have to continue their flight by boat.) Perhaps in a conversation with Crista Wolf Anna Seghers says that when you write for (30, 60, *n*. . .) years how can you separate living and writing, the lived and the written. Someone receives a book in the mail and writes back on a postcard, "It is life!"

Having eschewed product recognition for estrangement the stakes are high. "If there is an avant-garde in our time, it is probably bent on discovery through suicide." (Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn)* The writing of this Christa Wolf would not fall into such a category of avant-garde.

Memory outlasts the series of subjects, connects them. Sooner or later there is imitation and relief. *Who*se hands exceed the frame. The permeability of narration, increasing permeability of "characters" in the "story" which is "true." The assumptions of permanence about a name, its continuity, for example, are continuously thrown into question.

Corrections: A Man in the news article yesterday about Egon Krenz, the new East German leader, referred incorrectly to his native town, Kohlberg. It is now called Kolobrzeg and has been a part of Poland since 1945. *(New York Times,* 10.20.89)

Reason is also proposed as a function of memory, "a repeated moral act." (CW *The Quest for Christa T)*

"But the third person stands by and records what the second does to the first." (CW *The Quest for Christa T)* People are formed in their memories of each other as they mirror each other. Different sets of eyes and desires from the outcome.

September 26, 1989. Nancy Spero: "And so we think about war and total destruction." *Who* sees what *who* never thought existed. Do more names permit more birds? Do all the stories cluster around entity/memory/idea(l)?

A merging with the predicate and sometimes a separation. A threading and fraying took place. Take place. It is not about empathy, although empathic response is not precluded. No one is larger. The persons, layered, shattered, exposed, are flawed. "Human." Their impulses conflict, contradict. There is a presentation of a "reality," a "truth" emerging from dream and imagination, emotion and event. Characters are propositions of a new knowledge which constructs feelings and imaginings as characters. Memory is one thing, evidence another.

"Natural" is continuously questioned. For instance, "common sense" as natural, "feelings" as natural, unmediated by culture, ideology. People who occupy social positions, as we all do, occupy their roles. Social understandings require certain labels for certain responses to given events. For instance, in some cultures people are trained to associate pleasure with the acquisition of goods, with shopping. *Who* asks why.

> Of course there was more glass and more glitter in the shop windows in West Berlin, and there were things to buy which she had never even seen before. But she had known that already. She had liked all that, too, and had thought it would be fun to go shopping there. Still, all those things were connected to eating and drinking, clothes and sleeping. But why did one eat? (CW *Divided Heaven)*

Who is asking why.

To keep separate and direct or to reconfigure and act. "The need to write in a new way follows a new way of living in the world, although there may be a time lag." (CW *Reader and Writer) Context,* what was once called fate? *Action,* the collision of thought and language into writing?

Style as proposed by Barthes in *Writing Degree Zero* is the intersection of time and biology. Writing is proposed as the connector between creation and the social, or as Christa Wolf might say, between creation and the social.

> (the biologists) informed us that we should first of all not be amazed at the changing nature but at the continuity of biological forms, the complicated mechanism that enables the genes to reproduce themselves repeatedly, a mechanism unknown until recently. (CW *Reader and Writer)*

Known, unknown, it functions. If only there were roadside bookstores everywhere and buses to take us there.

Readiness is a state experience by *who*m, which allows certain things to happen. Readiness is not the same thing as prescience, nor does it assume a template for all future action and/or circumstance. Readiness is fluidity precluding separation from event. It is not a dialectical notion. Contradictions occur. Parts ≠ whole. People, being countries, have territory. And if the borders are eliminated. And is the state of thought independent of the thinker.

> Kleist has never before been among people who trespass so greatly on each other's territory and yet do not become enemies as a result. . . . He stretched out and experienced in body and limbs what freedom is, without a word even once entering his mind. (CW *No Place On Earth)*

		means		
before	SELF		SELF	(Descartes
		makes		etc.)
		means		
after	OTHER		SELF	(Deleuze
		makes		etc.)

"We used to be truly thankful whenever we were able to picture an idea." (CW *Accident)* "I was this" (Clark Coolidge) In this case, I permitted myself, my position, i.e., my experience, to tell me; and the language, in this case reprimand, proceeded from it.

Givens are no mother for circumstances. *just a thing being done to people in the name of a system* Anguish and orders going from action itself to some future writing is between. "Where we've all been for a while"—name, thought can join to form epithet. Future memory can be constructed action now. Christa Wolf impairs narrative.

> *With my burned hand*
> *I write about the nature of fire*
> Ingeborg Bachmann
>
> *"whose sentence it measures out"*
> Michael Palmer

Capriciousness has no place here. *Who* wills *who*se will.

Nelly, the little girl of *A Model Childhood* (also known as *Patterns of Childhood),* is constructed to embody, to impersonate the child Christa Wolf might remember was herself. The narrator describes the child's feeling that to have taken a prescribed position on things, everything, would have been more comfortable for her. She was not "one" with all the "correct" responses. *Who*se welling up of tears was an inappropriate response, punishable. Such memories are "engraved" by "guilt." *Who* could feel "only that which has been decreed?" In Nelly's schoolgirl life the only greeting permitted was "Heil Hitler." Another "hello" did not exist. "A person who wants to pass unnoticed soon stops noticing anything." *Who* disappeared—into—action?

They were deeply engrossed in something, by something, a fire, a baby. . . . Interrupted, they were embarrassed and had to suppress emotions they had not yet named. Anxious, dreaming mediations, internalized, proceed to construct. This writing is lifting scabs a reader/writer might have forgotten or wanted to forget exist. Poetics of investigation, never reassuring, never relying on the pleasure of recognition, familiarity. "The moon had risen, but outside your field of vision." (CW *A Model Childhood)* This is social space in distress, troubled, vision doubled, every place taken over, changed, erased, named and renamed.

> You closed your eyes and saw a clear and accurate image of the market square in L. (formerly G.) as Nelly had known it, and you found it difficult to visualize it in its present state, as you had just seen it. (CW *A Model Childhood)*

If. . .then. . . .

If Person is formed and informed by *time* (memory, interpolation, will) and *function* (conditions or a series of moments intersecting with the individual set) then what happens in a "vacuum," i.e., sudden elimination of "conditions"?

> Christa Wolf, the novelist, was one of the leading speakers at a rally of one million East Berliners. . . . Last week she completed the final draft of an appeal entitled "For Our Country," which argues for protecting the separate identity of the German Democratic Republic from West German encroachment. The appeal has already been signed by a quarter of a million citizens. *(New York Times* 12.9.89)

Birds are flying south in formation. Occupation is the ongoing condition of occupying or being occupied. What determines one's inner resources *at a time like this,* i.e., at any time?

In 1918, in *Geist der Utopie,* Ernst Bloch wrote, "I am. We are. That is enough. Now it is up to us to begin." In 1945, Sartre wrote, in *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme,* which was presented as a lecture, "Man is nothing other than what he does."

"I wonder if I should buy my son's new shoes now or wait until the revolution." (Cab driver, Yugoslavia, *NYT* 11.25.89) Proceed with the telling.

> *in the telling*
> *I happens*
> Michael Davidson

"Could she bear the sudden liberation from the old ideas of what was possible?" (CW *Divided Heaven)* "I saw a news item turn into truth." (CW *Cassandra)*

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In a 1924 manifesto called "Consistent Poetry," which appears in Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris's beautifully produced and edited selection of Schwitters's literary works, we read:

> Classical poetry counted on the similarities between people. It considered the association of ideas as unambiguous. It was mistaken. At any rate it built its foci on associations of ideas: "Uber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh" ("O'er every mountain peace does reign"). Here Goethe does not only want to indicate that there is quiet on mountain tops; the reader is supposed to enjoy this peacefulness in the same way the poet, tired from his official duties and usually functioning in an urban environment, does himself. That such associations of ideas are not all that commonly shared can be shown if one were to read such a line to someone from Heidjer (a region of two inhabitants per square kilometer). That person would certainly be much more impressed by a line like "lightning hairy zigzags the subway crushes the skyscraper." At any rate, the realization that all is quiet does not bring forth poetic feelings in him because, for him, quietness is the normal state of affairs. I cite this passage because its combination of common-sense. . . .
>
> Abstract poetry separated—and therein lies its great merit—the word from its associations, and played off word against word; more particularly concept against concept, while taking sound into account. That is more consistent than the evaluation of poetic feelings. . . . (pp. 223-24)

Absurd as it is to contemplate the impact of Goethe's nature lyric on the hypothetical inhabitant of Heidjer, Schwitters is not being merely playful here. What he sees is that, with the breakdown of the traditional class structures—structures that Goethe could take for granted—the transparency of language as carrier of "poetic feeling," directed toward an audience conditioned to "understand," sharing as it does the poet's own basic feelings, is called into question. No wonder Schwitters longed, as did so many poets of the post-World War I era, to create an "abstract poetry"—a poetry that might remove itself from "concepts" altogether. But how to achieve such a poetry? "Not the word but the letter is the original material

of poetry," Schwitters declares in the same manifesto. "Consistent poetry is constructed from letters. Letters have no concepts. Letters in themselves have no sound, they only offer the possibility to be given sound values by the performer. The consistent poem plays off letters and groups of letters against each other" (p. 225).

Shades of Khlebnikov's *zaum* poetry and, in our own day, the chance generated work of Jackson Mac Low (who recently wrote his own *"Merzgedichte* in memoriam Kurt Schwitters") and John Cage, who neatly echoes, in his preface to Mureau, Schwitters's assertion that "The elements of poetry are letters, syllables, words, sentences" (p. 215). Indeed as Rothenberg and Joris point out, the sound text and concrete poetry of the past few decades can be traced directly back to such works as Schwitters's famous "Ur Sonate," whose entire text (some 28 pages) is reproduced in this book, waiting for a set of readers to actualize its score. (A recording of Schwitters reading this amazing tour de force is available from *Gelbe Music* in Hamburg). And certainly Schwitters's alogical and non-grammatical poetry looks ahead to the "language poetry" of the current generation.

But from the translator's perspective, Schwitters's practice is nothing if not a mine field. For if "Not the word but the letter is the original material of poetry," how can translation, usually unable to duplicate the phonemes and morphemes of the original, be adequate? How, for example, to translate a line like "Duumdu" ("Er sie Es"), whose middle syllable "um" ("around") gives us not only the idea of "You on you" but also the paragram "Duum" which is a homonym for "dumm" or "stupid," hence "You stupid you." Pierre Joris translates the word as "Thouroundthou" (p. 13), which nicely duplicates the diphthong but loses Schwitters's double entendre.

Like Khlebnikov's often untranslatable (despite the recent valiant efforts of Paul Schmidt) poetry, Schwitters's poems depend so fully on their linguistic base—on pun and paragram, anaphora and rhyme, onomatopoeia and echolalia, that they seem to defy translation, with the result that this great artist, who is also considered a major poet in the German-speaking world (the scholarly Friedhelm Lach edition, published between 1973-76, runs to five large volumes), is almost unknown outside Germany. Indeed, such essays as have been written on his poetic composition are primarily the work of art historians—Werner Schmalenbach and John Elderfield, for example—who understand that Schwitters's writings—his early expressionist poems in the vein of August Schramm, the subsequent Dada poems like "An Anna Blume" (the much-anthologized poem which originally made Schwitters famous), the short prose pieces or "proses" as the editors ingeniously call them, the playlets, the visual and sound poems—are not only an integral part of Schwitters's *Merz* (for *Kommerz)* collage art but important in their own right.

The difficulty of translating Schwitters is compounded by the fact that in the last decade of his life when he was living in England, Schwitters translated some of his own early poetry and tried writing new poems in English (see pp. 100-118 of *pppppp*). Poets are not always their own best translators and as Werner Schmalenbach reports, Schwitters's English was always shaky. In 1942, with the help of Stefan Themerson, he translated his 1919 "An Anna Blume," the one poem of his that has made its way into every Dada textbook and anthology. It is the translation unfortunately included by Rothenberg and Joris in *pppppp* as well. I say unfortunately, because I think Schwitters's English version is a travesty of his subtle, witty, playful, and charming 1919 original.

Take the opening line, "O du, Geliebte, meiner 27 Sinne, ich liebe Dir!," which Schwitters translates as "O Thou, beloved of my twenty seven senses, I love thine!" The second-person singular pronoun "Du" is the familiar form of address (vis-à-vis the formal "Sie"), and in German, the pronouns have different endings for every case, singular and plural, whereas our own "you" has no variation, singular or plural, except for the genitive "your." Accordingly, no literal English translation can ever capture the sort of pronoun-play in which the German Schwitters regularly indulges. Still, I find the use of "Thou" ("thou, thee thee thine") questionable, for Schwitters's German is above all distinguished, as are his collages, by its respect for the ordinary, the everyday, the common, the banal. In this instance, the joke is that Anna, addressed quite naturally and colloquially as "O Du, Geliebte" is immediately deflated by the absurd hyperbole of "my twenty seven senses." And this, in turn, is followed by the absurd "Ich liebe dir"—absurd because "dir" is in the dative case whereas "liebe" takes the accusative "dich." "Ich liebe dir" thus turns Anna, who is after all addressed as "Du, ungezähltes Frauenzimmer" (a much less respectful address than "Thou, uncounted woman"!), into no more than the indirect object of the poet's "love." Grammar, let's remember, produces meanings.

By comparison, "I love thine" strikes me as no more than arch, a sort of pseudo-ee cummings locution. If one were to retranslate "An Anna Blume," perhaps the solution would be to take the literal option: since English designates the indirect object by means of a preposition, we might render the German as "I love to you" or "for you" and let the ambiguities develop. But Schwitters does other things to weaken his original: Anna's "green bird" becomes "wheels" (which eliminates the double entendre of "bird"), her red dress, literally sawed up ("zersägt") into white pleats becomes "thy red dress, clashed in white folds," and so on. Worst of all, the ambiguity of the name Anna Blume—is she an opening bud or a deflowered "schlichtes Mädchen"?—is lost in the coy "Anna Blossom." Schwitters mock-Petrarchan homage to the palindromic Anna of the streets with whom he is sleeping is thus largely deflected.

I mention this particular self-translation because Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris have evidently taken it and related Schwitters's translations at face value. "It's Schwitters," they say in their Introduction, "who gives the green light for our extensive use of second-person thou's, sometimes correctly grammatical, sometimes linked to first-person verbs" (p. xxx). And indeed, "thee" and "thou" are the pronouns of choice in these translations as are certain other archaisms not quite warranted in the supple and racy language of the original. "Ein Säuferstiel augt dumm das klage Tier," for example, has a comic, sardonic edge that is missing from the line "Drunkard's stem dumbly does eye the doleful beast" (p. 24). "Augt dumm" means "gapes" or "gapes stupidly"; "dumbly does eye" seems unnecessarily contrived. Again, "klage" is a coinage from "klagen" ("complain"): it can be read as the "whining" or "pathetic" animal, but "doleful beast"?

But these are minor flaws in what is often a brilliantly inventive rendering of Schwitters's all-but-untranslatable idiom. Take, for example, Rothenberg's "Subway Poem" ("Untergrundgedicht")

> Houses eyeball millions cudgel lamps
> Windows crunch on eyes
> Bellow light the subway-shuttle teeth
> German Daily News sleds past and music (super shoeshines)
> Adding machines spew numbers, Garden City
> Songs tender cannons' gold (physician tested)
> Windows live sans light grow numb
> Sans coal glass woodens
> Flames glass up
> Bellow crunch on light the window
> Flames glass flames
> Houses eyeball millions sparkle lamps
> And fire woodens coal light bellows forth
> (In case of crowds step to the centre aisle) (p. 35)

> Häuser augen Millionen peitschen Lampen
> Fenster beissen Augen
> Brüllen Licht die Untergrundbahn Zähne
> Deutsche Tageszeitung rodelt und Musik (bester Schuhputz)
> Additionmaschinen wirren Zahlen, Gartenstadt
> Lieder zarten die Kanonen Gold (ärztlich empfohlen)
> Fenster leben ohne Licht erstarren
> Ohne Kohle holzt das Glas
> Flamme glast
> Brüllen beissen Licht die Fenster
> Flamme glast die Flamme

Häuser augen Millionen funken Lampen
find die Flamme holzen Kohle brüllt das Licht.
(Bei Andrang in den Mittelgang treten.)[1]

This 1920 poem is the counterpart of Schwitters's *Merzbilder*: a catalogue of graphic images aligned with a minimum of punctuation in the tradition of the Futurist *parole in libertà*, which Schwitters surely knew, is "cut" by signboards, advertising slogans, and newspaper bits: "super shoeshines," "physician tested," and so on. The cacophony of the original is caught by onomatopoeic words like "cudgel" and "crunch" and compounds like "subway-shuttle teeth." Throughout, Rothenberg's poem replicates the heavy alliteration and assonance, and the strong-stress rhythm of Schwitters's poem, his use of idiom (e.g., "Flames glass up") captures the sardonic urbanism of this *Merzbau*, the city where everything has turned into commodity ("German Daily News sleds past"). "Subway poem" is followed by "High Fashion Furs" ("Feine Pelzmoden"), which takes the cataloguing technique of the former lyric even further, juxtaposing a set of images of street scenes (again *parole in libertà* like "Telephones broadcast baskets") with surreal references to the "Boil Intestines Pharmacy," "A-1 intestines" now populating what seems to be the entire city.

The catalogue poems, sentence series, and visual and sound poems bring to the fore all of the ingenuity of the poet-translators. In "Chinese Banalities" (p. 32), couplets like "Spice is the variety of life. / Every apron has a wife" has precisely the nursery-rhyme effect of "Würze is des Witzes Kürze. / Jede Frau hat eine Schürze." And Rothenberg's rendition of the title poem provides a masterful verbal-visual equivalent of the erotic play of the original:

p p p p p p p p p p
pornographic i-poem

The go
Its bleating is
Sweet & peaceful
And it will not
With its horns

The black line shows where I cut lengthwise into a harmless poem in a children's picture book. From the goat I got the go.

And it will not | **be provoked**
With its hams | **to shove & poke.** (p. 81)

p p p p p p p p p p

pornographisches i-Gedicht

Die Zie
Diese Meck ist
Liebe und friedlich
und sie wird sich
Mit den Hörnern

Der Strich zeigt, wo ich das harmlose Gedichten aus einem Kindergilderbuch durgeschnitten habe, der Länge nach. Aus der Ziege ist so die Zie geworden.

Und sie wird sich | **nicht erbossen**
Mit den Hörnern | **Each zo stossen**. (FL 95)

"The go" is even more surprising than the original "Die Zie" (cut-up for "Ziege") because "go" is not a syllable in "goat." The "go" that "bleats" is very suggestive, especially when we learn that "Its bleating is / Sweet & peaceful." What is it that the "go[at]" "will not". . . "with its horns"? Fill in your own story, a story which is then "explained" by reference to the complete page in the children's book:

And it will not be provoked
With its horns to shove & poke.

Here the translation almost betters the original, "shove" and "poke" being paragrammatically inside "provoked" whereas Schwitters's nursery rhyme has the simpler pattern of the rhyme "erbossen" / "stossen."

But perhaps the most important items in the Rothenberg-Joris book, aside from the great "Ur Sonata," which is reproduced in its entirety, are the "proses" like "The Onion" and "Augusta Bolte," both important precursors for works like Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* or Gilbert Sorrentino's procedural fictions. These works, almost unknown to the English-speaking reader, have Gertrude Stein-like phrasal permutations, intercut by commercial cliches as is the "Subway poem" but on a larger scale. The 28-page "Auguste Bolte," written in 1923 and published in *Der Sturm*, is the fictional equivalent of Schwitters's *Merzbilder*. The title alludes to the cranky Widow Bolte, whom every German schoolchild of the period would have recognized from Wilhelm Busch's famous Max und Moritz. In Schwitters's version, Auguste Bolte becomes a young girl, in search of a PhD in "Lif"; indeed the text is subtitled "a doctoral dissertation." Rather than actually collaging cliches and advertising jingles into the text as he did in "Subway poem," Schwitters here interweaves the language of ordinary people in all its absurdity, comedy, and pathos. Beginning with a "wise saying"

pronounced by his five-year old son Ernst ("What one chews turns to mush"), Schwitters declares that his "allegory for good old Aart-ccriticism" is "a natural and faithful reproduction of the critiques in daily papers. The daily press on art, the so-called daily-artpress, wears a little girl's dress. Chaste and modest, it has tied a tiny apron over it, with embroidery trimmings" (p. 139). Like Joyce's Dublin, where Gerty MacDowell is similarly "chaste and modest," the petit-bourgeois "polite society" of Schwitters's Hannover masks a vicious savagery just underneath its placid surface.

As the story opens, "Augusta Bolte saw about 10 people on the street, who all advanced in one and the same direction. This seemed suspicious to Augusta Bolte, very suspicious indeed. 10 people were walking in one and the same direction. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. Something was going on there" (p. 140). It becomes Augusta's mission to find out where these ten people are going, a mission complicated when the 10 break into 2 5s, the 5s into 2 + 3 and finally into five 1s. Along the way, Augusta, "who had been such a brilliant girl, so gifted even back in school" (the phrase is repeated again and again), gets "stuck into a metric pattern," and draws conclusions that "went against her grain. For a moment she wondered what that grain was, against which, in a way, it went" (p. 141). When the 10 split into 2 5s, she considers it "a scandalous impertinence of the mass to split up or, better, to divide" (p. 142). "Why indeed," Augusta Bolte wonders, "did 10 people have to split up into groups of 5. That kind of thing was a shrewd tactic of the, in a way, hostile mass." And so on.

The nasty logic and paranoia exhibited in such passages eerily anticipate the Nazi mentality already nascent in Schwitters's Germany. Cliché piles on cliché: Augusta's path now crosses that of one Richard Eckermester, a young ne-er do well who never made it through school: "Neither the carrot nor the stick had had any effect" (159); Eckermester is seen by Augusta descending from a hackney cab and "abscond[ing] into a house":

> The die was cast, and the man had absconded into a house. Miss Professor Augusta had her car stop. It was clear that something was going on here. Why else should a man abscond into a house? You can't fit that into a hollow tooth! Why else should a man jump into a hackney cab to abscond into a house? Why? Something was certain: if nothing was happening here, then nothing was happening anywhere. Although the reverse could be true too. And while Augusta realized the equivalence of all values, as she now realized that, depending on one's taste, everything could prove everything

or nothing, a new unheard of realization came to her, namely that it did not matter if one attended it or not.

Nobody could attend to everything. Man had to make a choice. And he had to make a choice. And he had to make a choice, not because he had to make a choice, but because in itself it didn't matter if he made a choice or if he didn't make a choice. (p. 162)

The permutations here are less Steinian than reminiscent of Beckett's *Watt.* And indeed, Schwitters' prose, subtly rendered by Rothenberg and Joris here (although the recurrent rhyme "Auguste wusste. . . das sie. . .musste" is not quite conveyed by "Augusta musta"), anticipates the nervousness, anxiety, illogicality, and comic/horrific irresolution of Beckett's fiction as well as his clown plays.

It is a scandal that this edition of Schwitters's work, produced as it is by two of the finest poet-translators writing today, has not (at least so far) gotten the recognition it deserves. The *New York Times Book Review,* the *New York Review of Books,* the *New Republic* and comparable periodicals have not reviewed it. But this silence would hardly have surprised Schwitters. For the bourgeois mindset that he so mercilessly parodizes in works like "Auguste Bolte" is the mindset that continues to treat him with "suspicion." He would have shrugged that suspicion off good humoredly with something like the "cadenza" from *Ur Sonata:*

Priimiititti too
Priimiititti taa
Priimiititti too
Priimiititti taa

Priimiititti tootaa

—MARJORIE PERLOFF

Notes

1 Kurt Schwitters, *Das Literarische Werk: Band I, Lyrik,* ed. Friedhelm Lach (Köln: DuMont Shauberg, 1973), p. 81. Subsequently cited as FL.

Pollux by Pam Rehm (Buffalo: Leave Books, 1992); *little brass pump* by Gale Nelson (Buffalo: Leave Books, 1992); *Answer, From the Letters of Mina Harker, to Ron Day and Robert Glück* by Dodie Bellamy (Buffalo: Leave Books, 1992)

These three brief thematic "works" (each comprised of one poem) show how contrasting approaches to (the) varying metrics of poetry (in Bellamy's case, an epistolary *poetics)* can sustain interest beyond the rigidity (or even, "particularities") of subject matter.

Take, for instance, Pam Rehm's entry, *Pollux*, the most thematically astute of these three poems.

Unlike her more sectionally defined concurrent "collection" *Piecework (o-blek editions*, 1992), this poem descriptively eschews metaphorical example by demonstrating the palimpsestic nature of writing in relation to its. . . double. The work opens with this citation from H. D.: "often one is lost and seeks the other, as in the oldest fairy tale of the twin-brother-sister of the Nile Valley."

More revealing still, according to Webster's New World Dictionary, Rehm's title, *Pollux*, denotes "a red giant star, actually the brightest star in the constellation Gemini"; yet, this star is mythically "considered the twin of Castor."

Could it be (is it plausible?) that when Rehm writes "the first print/ was of nails" she is addressing the unorigined "origins" of writing? And that further along in the poem when she echoes those cited lines she's eluding to the same cosmological effacement as it meets the substitutive flesh of *"human"* language:

> First bury a stone
> then take away its foundation.
>
> It trembles 'alone'
>
> Thus

Language thus*ly* becomes the result of an unacknowledged doubling ("It all comes back to Betrayal"); an "acknowledged" fact of relatable/ related. . .existence(s)?: "Castor/ A poisoned comb/ Held, spindle-prick/ Blow the trumpet."

In contrast to Rehm, Gale Nelson's *little brass pump* works the metonymic chain of semantical *(ized)* substitution; though, again, within an

ordered, metricalized prosody. For if Rehm is concerned with metaphor as representative of "the forced equivalence of two knowns" (Mary Gerhart's definition), then Nelson always already *assumes* this to be the case.

Subjectively constituted as a poetic allegory on a monk who makes cheese, the poem lexically breaks semantic coherence at several a-temporalized points (meaning the poet outruns his rhetorical determinations. . .); though Nelson easily regains breath by lyrically emphasizing the poem's stanzaic structuation: "or I move onto such subjects/ outside my range, such as the/ hue along the horizon, and I/ look again at the skirts nearing the place the dogs get bouncy. And/ you might get tired of this, but/ did I get any mail today, or is/ this the exception? (. . .)."

Dodie Bellamy's *Answer* (a kind of literalized result of the work of Rehm and Nelson) is written in the form of "overheard" letters by friends. At once a rhetoricalized critique of social assumptions and an imagined investigation into the workings of discursive intervention, this brief "work" has more than a few astounding (or even, *confounding)* moments in its deconstructive focus on what-was-*really*-said-to-whom.

The first "coumuniqué" (cited as written by Robert Glück to Bellamy) sets the directional tone of the writing, stating "the question" that will be responded to (in varying ways of elaboration) by the entries that follow.

> Dear Dodie,
>
> I am writing about a woman, Margery Kempe, and I would like to ask you for your help. Would you write 5-10 observations of aspects of having a woman's body —at any point in life, or life's activities? Or just having a body period. I would like to apply them to Margery.
>
> XOX Bob

As these dispersional communiqués proliferate, their particularized features foreshadow Bellamy's concluding *textualized* response. Even as early as the second "letter" (under the name of Ron Day, addressed to "Mina," but fictively written by "Cassandra") one notes an accumulative discursive "logic" straining to accommodate the inherent existentialism of epistolary enunciation: "Dodie explained a relation that you're necessarily inscribed in. Bob wants to know the body of a woman—which makes me wonder if Bob doesn't want any-body in one body—that is, in no-body—that is, in his ideas. Is it your body he wants to possess—or some biorhythm in the text—a text whose bodies are 'confused.' The organicism of all this bothers me—it seems voyeuristic—w/all those ideas of science and law behind it, in the gaze of the question."

Ultimately, Cassandra (the fictive signatory under the name of Ron Day) concludes: "As I told Dodie, my advice is that you shouldn't *reply*. I think you should *possess him by the letter*."

Bellamy's concluding response (in the personage of Mina Harker and addressed, "fictively," to Cassandra) takes on a rhetoricalized discursiveness pleading a comparison á la *écriture feminine*, or even, a bit closer to home, to the work of Kathy Acker. For while Bellamy (like Glück and Day) uses—instrumentally—the semiotics of fictive signatory address (undoubtedly to establish a phantom subject-position from which to write), her entry (unlike the preceding), is almost *completely textualized*.

One could almost say that Bellamy's writerly position within a fictively conceived signatory semiotics has been rhetoricalized into a pseudo-discourse. But for this to happen, she has had to *literally* denounce herself, as the reader must *letter*ally do the opposite: "Why does Bob bother Dodie about these corporeal verities? She's just passing through, a breeze animating a few molecules, while I Mina Harker am here for the duration."

Under one of her many hilariously conceived pseudo-subtitles ("THE FEMALE BODY IS NOT A BARREL OF MONKEYS"), Bellamy responds to Glück's query (and quite a bit else) by transforming the epistolary *mode* of address into a writerly notion that creates (a) text:

THE TEXT IS NOT MY BODY as if emotions weren't visceral as if I Mina Harker the debutante of the (un)dead could be concrete in such a flat way, page number typed in my upper right corner WHERE ARE MY ARMS MY LEGS WHY CAN'T I MOVE ABOUT—*THE TEXT IS NOT A BODY* it's a coffin. . .

In *Answer* Bellamy and friends have taken the notion of shifting subjectivities and linked it to a signatory semiotics; resulting in a *letter*al critique of gender*ed* relations.

—ROGER RIGGINS

The Light around the Poem

Once again this year, poetry lovers Here, North of Here, and Abroad have wondered why Steve McCaffery has been passed over for the Nobel Prize.

His books continue to dazzle: most recently, *Theory of Sediment* (Talonbooks, 1991), which includes "Lastwordia," a lexical sweep through the history of English words, which starts: "An intervention buffer friendly to diskette that transit via chunnel" and ends "scada aenigne hetelic weard fela heahfaestne fleon lastworda."

But I want to call attention to McCaffery's *Modern Reading: Poems 1969-1990*, published in 1992 by Bob Cobbing's Writers Forum, England's most prestigious press, in a limited "A5" xeroxed-&-gumbound edition [89A Petherton Rd, London N5 2QT]. This is something of a miscellany) with many visual and conceptual works, along with a number of relatively short sequences. McCaffery's profound meditations on contemporary society cut through the cant of many a lesser poet, as when he observes, wryly, in a poem entitled "Mozart in Tibet" (evidently celebrating the bicentennial of the death of the Central European child prodigy): "Eroded centaur print reform for error. / Panda scream rampant toil fir sheers." But McCaffery does not confine himself to such exquisite lyric handling of language. His expressive gift becomes almost painfully evident in his refusal to accept grief as inevitable result of loss: "Shazzed it hats / wergeld code lawn / boot act pimp / casket id" (from "Storax"). He also offers sage advice to reviewers in "Codicil": "This information as commodity informs the institution speaking this" and "In the case above it would be wrong to call the following a viewpoint."

The most exciting voices in the UK these days, or some of them, are coming from Maggie O'Sullivan, who's synthesizing the constructivist and incantatory, local and loco, rhythm and "contorted lure." Her latest book is *In the House of the Shaman*, from Reality Street Editions (available—like all the books I'll mention from here on, from SPD). In North America, meanwhile, two exuberant, high-intensity poetry performances have been published by Tsunami Editions in Vancouver: Deanna Ferguson's *The Relative Minor*—an ideological and semantic high-wire act that knocked me over with shock waves of poetic intelligence—and Kevin Davies's comically probing and probingly comic *Pause Button*.

Highly recommended: Joan Retallack's *[adjective deleted by the hyperbole control officer]* incursion into the space between correct and correction, *Errata Suite* (Aerial Edge); Erica Hunt's long-awaited *Local History* (Roof), which, in its interrogation of its own expressive forms, insists on the interdependence of complexity of thought and social engagement; *A Stein Reader*, edited by Ulla Dydo (Northwest University Press)—simply the most important collection of Stein's writings now available and a crucial supplement to new editions of *Tender Buttons* and (forthcoming) *Stanzas in Meditation* (Sun & Moon) and *Everybody's Autobiography* (Exact

Change); Nick Piombino's evocative meditations on the multiple processes of poetic writing, *Boundary of Blur* (Roof); and *Writing from the New Coast*, a special double issue of *o.blek*, featuring poems by 119 new or newly publishing writers and, in the second volume, poetics statements by 93 writers, most of whom are represented in volume one.

Finally, I want to take special note of Barbara Guest's extraordinary new book *Defensive Rapture* (Sun & Moon), which extends the surface-inflected, supremely modulating explorations of *Fair Realism* into realms both warbling and chimeric.

—CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Revell's *Erasures* and the Fugue of History

Revell, Donald. *Erasures*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1992. 47 pages. $10.95 paper.

The question of hope is intrinsic to Donald Revell's newest and most unsettling collection. These poems range over the newly structured terrain of Europe, that threshing ground of political gestation: the scope of the poems is often nothing less than the ongoing revision and reconstruction of the entire European facade of Western Civilization—the restructured continent and culture that entered this "beautiful century" in the regalia of various long-standing systems of belief, of orthodox religiosities and ideologies, of intellectual movements long past fruition, and looks to exit these hundred years in a substantially altered form. But the vast terrain of European/American culture is not the only matrix of these poems, for they also fuse the large cycles of historical movement to the intense dramas of personal suffering in a reflective manner. For both agonies share a similar trait: they repeat.

In *Erasures*, Revell speaks to such a desperate sense within many, the sense that every political as well as every personal moment is a sort of glorified deja vu. To create this sensation, these poems rely on an amazing lyrical flexibility: the contexts overlap; voices blend then emerge anew. Like the cyclical histories that bind individuals to their movements of revolution, oppression, and terror, these poems syntactically and lexically recur. As history repeats, as the agonies of the past are acted out on the

illusory fresh stages of the present, Revell uses a form of irregular repetition that makes such recursion manifest.

Erasures is a very good book. And very disturbing precisely because of the way these echoes haunt, the way they compel us to recognize the flexibility and malleability of meaning, the way they reveal the thin barriers between the private and the public, the personal and the political, the present and the past, and then ask us to erase such barriers and realize new orderings, a challenging task indeed.

—TOD MARSHALL

American Poetry Since 1950: Innovators and Outsiders, An Anthology edited by Eliot Weinberger (Marsilio Publishers, New York, 1993)

> When I awakened in the later 1950s I discovered Blake saying: "I must either create my own 'system' or be trapped in another's"—for which you might substitute the word "anthology."
> —Jerome Rothenberg, "On Anthologies" (1973)

Why this anthology, and at this time? In a note in *Sulfur 20*, Eliot Weinberger situates Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1960) and Ron Silliman's *In the American Tree* (1986). The first, he says, is "in many ways, an expression of Eisenhower America"; the second "is an expression of Reagan America." He does not tell us in what ways *The New American Poetry* expressed the America of the Eisenhower years (1953–1961) perhaps because those who were awakened (called back to poetry as I was) consider this epoch-making anthology an advent. Here was the good news of what was new that had been stirring and gathering force (creative mass) since the end of World War II. Or since 1950, the date Weinberger chooses to mark the beginning of his anthology, the year in which Olson published both "The Kingfishers" and "Projective Verse," the former the initial (initiating) poem in Allen's anthology, both poem and essay summons to the will to change.

With Silliman's anthology Weinberger explicitly tells us what he means by "expression of": "In an era of rampant nationalism and xenophobia. . .we have an anthology of new writing so nationalistic and xenophobic that it salutes America in its title, divides its poets more or less along state lines, and deliberately excludes some excellent poets who had the misfortune to be born a few miles north of the border." *(American,* it should be noted, figures in the titles of both Allen's and Weinberger's anthologies, and both omit Canadian poets.) Weinberger's beef is chiefly with the "language" poets whose characteristic "stylistic gesture," he goes on to say, "is the non-sequitur (which is quite different. . .from Cubist simultaneity, Surrealist collage, or the Poundian ideogrammic method)." This gesture, he believes, is "the product of a generation raised in front of a television" and moved to practice the art of the Great Communicator. In explaining how he selected the poets included in *American Poetry Since 1950,* Weinberger says that "No poets born after World War II are included, thanks to that ruling demon, space, and because many of the precursors to the present younger generation—the contexts in which the latest developments are occurring—remain so little known."

Yes, he is thankful for the ruling demon that enables him to exclude the generation that came of age with television. But when he says that the precursors are so little known, to whom is he referring? And to whom are these poets little known? Readers of *Sulfur,* who may have been readers of *Caterpillar* and, before that, of *Origin,* and those readers who found *The New American Poetry* and ever afterward kept themselves mindful of the newness, have long since studied and possessed most of the poets in Weinberger's anthology, poets to be returned to now with pleasure of the kind we have in retrospection. *American Poetry Since 1950* is a retrospect, a choice exhibit (and an exhibit of choices), except to those who need it most, the uninformed for whom it may be as exhilarating as *The New American Poetry* was.

Retrospects sometimes open prospects. I think, for example, of Jerome Rothenberg's *Revolution of the Word: A New Gathering of American Avant Garde Poetry 1914-1945* (1974). Included in this small anthology—excellent preparation for Weinberger's anthology—are Gertrude Stein and Mina Loy as well as H.D., Hart Crane and Robert Duncan, Marcel Duchamp and Jackson Mac Low, and, notably, the Objectivist poets Charles Reznikoff, Louis Zukofsky, and George Oppen (all of *Discrete Series).* Weinberger is similarly concerned, as his subtitle suggests, with "Innovators and Outsiders," and he is willing to keep things open, at least on the sectors of the front represented by the poets he has included. His motive, I think, is the salutary one that Rothenberg ascribed to *The New American Poetry* and, with less

certainty, to its revised edition, *The Postmoderns:* "to take stock of where we are & where we have been, as a way of returning to an openness that may allow us—again—to move ahead." Always, *again.*

Rothenberg is the master anthologist of our time. His every anthology provides the widest range of linguistic resources as well as recovers sources and continuities, and all of his anthologies are in the service of "a poetry of changes." I have quoted above from Rothenberg's "Keeping It Old: A Review of the New *New American Poetry" (Sulfur 6),* which, with Clayton Eshleman's "The Gospel According to Norton" *(APR,* September/October 1990), seems to me the most useful in assessing *American Poetry Since 1950.*

Rothenberg is displeased with what he considers the closure of *The Postmoderns: The New American Poetry Revised* (1982). The new edition of the Donald Allen anthology has become respectable. It omits, as Weinberger's anthology does, the sectioning into Black Mountain, San Francisco, Beat, and New York School, and arranges the poets "neutrally & chronologically, by year of birth." In conjunction with the omission of the statements on poetics, which in *The New American Poetry* acknowledged the "poets' right to context their own works and lives" and contributed to its "manifesto quality," this turns attention from "an evolving & open poetics" to reputations, and the result is canon-making.

American Poetry Since 1950 is an attractive book. It is not a formidable anthology, an "anthology package" (Rothenberg's term) like those published by W.W. Norton & Company, and its design suggests that it is not a textbook, though, with luck, it may become one. Weinberger's account of the history of poetry since 1950—"very brief," he says; too brief, I'd say, but lively in his inimitable fashion—is to be found at the back of the book along with bibliographies of the presently available editions of the poets' work, much of it now published by trade and university presses. That's it: no ponderous introduction, no headnotes, no footnotes. There are no statements on poetics, maybe because Weinberger thinks that they are no longer needed, though surely the uninformed, both the teachers who will hesitate to adopt this book and the students who will have to make their way in it, would be helped by the rules of reading a poetics provides. Weinberger's bibliographies improve on those in *The Postmoderns,* which mostly serve the scholar who will trouble to search for fugitive editions; they are not tightly printed in small type, textbook style. Coming on them at the end of the book invites the reader to go on, to stay in the open by turning to the *works.* This is as it should be, unless the reader prefers, as I do, to begin with the works and dispense with anthologies altogether. And

there are no biographical notes, which seems to me a needless omission, all the more so since the details of the lives of Nathaniel Tarn, Clayton Eshleman, and others that Weinberger gives us in his postscript are pertinent.

The poets in *American Poetry Since 1950* are arranged by date of birth and therefore cluster into generations that can be identified as Modernist, Objectivist, Projectivist, and so on (I have no label for the youngest poets: Sobin, Howe, Coolidge, and Palmer). Perhaps to a large extent, postmodern covers most of them. Rothenberg appreciated the sectioning in *The New American Poetry* for what it said about diversity, always for him a salient feature of the poetic landscape. Instead of this, Weinberger's arrangement suggests a common enterprise and steady going-on. He includes thirty-five poets, five of them women, with as little as three pages given to Everson and as many as sixteen given to Olson. The mean, about ten or so pages, is enough to allow a number of poets to be represented by poems of considerable length, that is, not by brief lyrics, as in most anthologies. Of the sixty poets who according to Eshleman should have been included in *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, Weinberger includes sixteen. This small number is explained by the inclusion of some of his poets in *The Norton Anthology* (where they no longer appear as innovators and outsiders) and by his cutoff date.

The New American Poetry begins with Olson, with "The Kingfishers," which we encounter much later in *American Poetry Since 1950*, a good fourth of the way into the book. Weinberger does not explain this move in his account of the four functions of his "hubbub of conversations": "as a place to find certain amazing poems; as an introduction to the work of this historical moment; as an alternative to the existing anthologies; and, above all, as a signpost pointing to the books of the individual poets." By beginning with Williams, Pound, and H.D., he seems to want to establish what *Sagetrieb* calls the "Pound-H.D.-Williams Tradition" and subsequently considers the "Imagist/Objectivist Tradition." He makes good the latter by the chronological good fortune of having Reznikoff, Niedecker, Zukofsky, and Oppen precede Olson. As for the former, chronology enables him to make a significant alteration: to put Williams in first place and thereby question Pound's right to command an era.

Weinberger's anthology is a direct response to Eshleman's essay and his demand for a book that would challenge the gospel according to Norton: "An expanded and updated version of Don Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1960)—a book that would cover 1960 to 1990. Besides poets whose work began to appear in this period, it might resourcefully contain certain

advances by writers who broke new ground earlier. The fact that no book like this exists now shows to what extent the NAMP *[The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry]* and its kin dominate the poetry textbook anthology market." Eshleman notes the failure of *The Postmoderns* and cites Rothenberg's concern for the omission of many of the new "alternative poetic strategies." Weinberger does not heed this so much as the notion of including poets who broke ground earlier, and he manages to do this by choosing 1950, which, in respect to Williams (b. 1883), Pound (b. 1885), and H.D. (b. 1886), allows him to include *current work* that shows these founding poets clinging to the advance. (Williams in *Spring and All:* "How easy to slip/ into the old mold, how hard to/ cling firmly to the advance.")

"The Kingfishers" is a more difficult (less accessible) poem than "The Desert Music," but this is not a reason to begin with Williams' poem. In the Williams-Creeley correspondence, Creeley tells Williams that he has told Rainer Gerhardt (another anthology-maker of sorts), "NO american poetry, without you at the top"—this, in 1950. And there is considerable evidence of the excitement Creeley, Olson, and Corman felt on reading a poem that they recognized (with the proverbial shock) as provocatively new and useful. Olson: "I think DM his *best*—a 1st rate, big, thing." And when Corman, who had been "overwhelmed" by the poem, obtained it for *Origin*, Olson advised him to "open with—WCW—Desert Music."

Olson's *big* is another reason. "The Desert Music" may be said to be the module that determined many of Weinberger's other choices. Williams' poem (364 lines) is not as long as *The Waste Land* (434 lines), but it is a poem of *size*, to use another Olson measure, demanding the same kind of attention. Pound is not represented by any poem of comparable length, though selections from *The Cantos* call up one of the longest poems of our time, a book-length poem beyond the reach of the anthologist that helps us assess poems of moderate length. H.D.'s "Red Rose and a Beggar" (376 lines), one of the three long poems of *Hermetic Definition*, is here in its entirety; and "Massacres" (264 lines), a section, complete in itself, of *Holocaust*, represents Reznikoff. There are 376 lines of Langston Hughes' "Montage of a Dream Deferred"; two of the longer poems of Lorine Niedecker, "Paean to Place" and "Darwin"; three lengthy pieces of Zukofsky's *"A"* and an equally long example of his (and Celia's) translation of Catullus; an ample selection—a condensation, as it were—of Rexroth's "The Love Poems of Marichiko"; and all of Oppen's "Route" (215 lines).

Then, Olson's "The Kingfishers" (190 lines). Weinberger's choices here are those that Eshleman calls for in his essay: "it seems grossly unfair that the small Olson section [of *The Norton Anthology]* omits 'The Kingfishers' (the

Post-Modernist equivalent to *The Waste Land),* 'In Cold Hell,' 'The chain of memory is resurrection,' and selections from the last three-quarters of *The Maximus Poems."* Space limitation accounts for the omission of "In Cold Hell" and more than one poem from *The Maximus Poems.* But Weinberger gives Olson prominence by using as a frontispiece one of Olson's circularly-disposed poems, this one with two circles (recalling Van Gogh?) from the manuscripts of *The Maximus Poems.* (I would have preferred "This is the Rose of the World.") He may also have done this because the only poet here whose "'field' practice" matches Olson's is Susan Howe, the "true heir," he says, of Olson.

After Olson, there are selections, samples of longer poems, that are in keeping with the module, and there are several complete poems of moderate length. *Selections:* from Cage's "Diary: How to Improve the World. . .."; Mac Low's "The Presidents of the United States of America"; Ronald Johnson's *ARK;* Duncan's "Passages" (six of them, including "Up Rising," which Eshleman recommends in his essay as "the greatest of the anti-Vietnam War poems," and "The Feast," the only poem—"everything from 'The Tribunals'"—that Weinberger was able to include); Creeley's *Pieces*—"Mazatlán: Sea," an excellent choice because this integral piece refigures the proceeding of this book-length poem; Rothenberg's *A Seneca Journal;* and Palmer's "Baudelaire Series." *Complete poems of length:* Ginsberg's "The Change" and "Wales Visitation"; O'Hara's "In Memory of My Feelings"; Antin's "Definitions for Mendy"; Eshleman's "Hades in Manganese"; Kelly's "Those Who Are Beautiful"; Sobin's "Girandole" and "Irises"; Howe's "Thorow"; and Coolidge's "Peru Eye, The Heart of the Lamp."

The preponderance of poems of moderate length gives this anthology its distinction. It will of course be useful as a supplement or alternative to *The Norton Anthology* and others like it, especially now that embattled anthologies have appeared, anthologies such as Robert Richman's *The Direction of Poetry: An Anthology of Rhymed and Metered Verse Written in the English Language since 1975* (1988). But I think it has another use, that is, the use to which I would put it. I have used an anthology only once, in this instance Michael Ondaatje's *The Long Poem Anthology,* a still-current collection of nine long (serial) poems, some as long as and some longer than those in Weinberger's anthology, by avant-garde Canadian poets. This is the worthy anthology with which to compare Weinberger's. For what especially recommends his book are the "certain amazing poems," all of them of length, that it contains and puts, as it were, in dialogue; *amazing* because postmodern in the ways so carefully defined by Joseph Conte in *Unending Design.*

No one will contest Weinberger's choice of poets. But since anthologies are part of literary production and in large measure (all the more so because they are used as textbooks) determine who is in and who is out, which is to say, who merits attention and whom we can afford to neglect, his omissions may trouble us. I will mention a few poets whom I miss: Ed Dorn, my choice *Recollections of Gran Apachería*, at the loss, of course, of the comic book format; Armand Schwerner, if not some of *The Tablets*, then "sounds of the river Naranjana" or "The Bacchae Sonnets"; Diane Wakoski, perhaps a part of *Greed*. After all, do we want a canon of innovators and outsiders, those who "make it new" and are outside the established canon, outlaws, as Williams felt himself to be, outside the walls of the city and therefore free to break the rules? Weinberger might well have appended a list of the good poets excluded, with suggested readings.

If *American Poetry Since 1950* is a textbook intended to challenge the kind of anthology in the "poetry textbook anthology market," it enters the market at a disadvantage because it is not a "teaching-oriented anthology" and in almost everything lacks the "teachability" which determines the kind of anthologies now being used (see Eshleman, *Novices*, 33). To use this anthology, the teachers themselves will have to be (re)oriented. Even anthologies like *The Norton Anthology* that include some of the innovators and outsiders, "limit new ways of reading, perpetuating old ways of reading the new poetry" (Alan Golding, cited by Eshleman). I recall the incredible difficulty, never overcome, I had in guiding a student who persisted in reading Olson according to the poetics set out in the New Criticism; and one of the things I learned in a lifetime of teaching, some of it down the hall from a writers workshop, is that too few teachers have the will to change and the will to find the innovators and outsiders for themselves. Will these teachers—their number seems to increase as the distance from major cities, great universities, and good bookstores increases—adopt an anthology that requires them to learn to read anew, to track down references in the library, and to teach poems that cannot be taught tidily in a fifty-minute period? Open poetry demands an open classroom—I mean classes than run on over long afternoons or long evening sessions perhaps not quite as long as those that Olson held at Black Mountain College.

Some teachers, of course, will be grateful for Weinberger's anthology and will use it to open, literally, a new world. What I said in the previous paragraph is by way of a lament for the time it takes—nearly fifty years now—to make even such small gains. Weinberger's anthology will contribute to the erosion of the old ways but it also reminds us of their persistence

Finally, since Weinberger's essay closes the book, let me say something about it. I am always delighted, here as elsewhere, by Weinberger's little facts and startling opinions. I didn't know that Oppen was "the only important American poet since the Civil War to actually engage in combat" and it never occurred to me that Kenneth Rexroth, deservedly prominent here, "wrote the greatest heterosexual love poems in English in this century." What interests me most in Weinberger's essay is his nostalgia for the time before the 1970s when poets were less dependent on universities and writers workshops were fewer and did not dominate the world of poetry to the extent they do now. Weinberger does not tell us how many of the poets in his anthology depended or depend for their livelihood on colleges and universities; fewer, I find, than I had expected, the reason for this being the exclusion of poets born after World War II. But is it true, as Weinberger thinks, that the hardship these poets experienced in fending for themselves and managing to survive contributed to their distinction? I concur with much that Weinberger says about writers workshops but remember a time in the late 1960s when Anselm Hollo and others brought the news to the Iowa Writers Workshop, and Barrett Watten of the Workshop got up a free university course (evenings, actually, when we read and discussed Pound, Zukofsky, Olson, and some others) to supplement the curriculum, and a Workshop student, fresh from Buffalo, enlivened my seminar on Olson. I conclude from the biographical note that Weinberger is not now nor never has been connected with a university and may count himself among the lucky ones who are independent. Still, the universities are mostly where it's at—where many of the innovators and outsiders get their livings, and poetry readings and classes and seminars, as Duncan once told me, keep the poets alive. Like Lewis Hyde, in *The Gift*, Weinberger has not come to terms with the university as patron nor fairly represented the benefits—there are some—of the present conditions of poetic production. There is bite in his querulousness, but for whom does he think he has made his textbook?

—SHERMAN PAUL

Noticings

Ralph Maud, at 1104 Maple St., Vancouver BC V6J 3R6, continues to edit and publish "Minutes of the Charles Olson Society," now in its 3rd issue. "Minutes" runs around 30 pages per issue, continuing scholarship begun by the late George Butterick in *Olson*. Maud is happy to send it to anyone in exchange for a modest donation. He is also in the process of assembling Olson letters for a "Selected Letters of Charles Olson," and asks anyone with pertinent letters to contact either him or Richard Fyffe, at the Homar Babbidge Library, University of Connecticut, Storrs CT 06269.

Pied Oxen Printers, directed by David Sellers, has just published *Sixteen T'ang Poems*, translated with a poem by Gary Snyder, with a Hanga woodcut by William Paden, 100 copies, a beautiful book. Readers of Eliot Weinberger's *19 Ways of Looking at Wang Wei*, which ends with Snyder's version of "Deer Camp," will find 4 more Wang Wei poems here, along with versions of poems by Meng Hao-jan, Tu Fu, Liu Ch'ang-ch'ing, Wang Chih-huan, Lo Tsung-yuan, Wang Ch'ang-ling, Tu Mu, Yuan Chen, Po Chü-i, and Chang Chi. Commenting on Snyder's "Deer Camp," Weinberger wrote: "Every word of Wang has been translated, and nothing added, yet the translation exists as an American poem." I can't imagine better versions of these poems. The Paden woodcut, drawing upon images from several of the poems—including a pile of red beans!—is masterful.

Now here comes Robin Blaser's *The Holy Forest* (Coach House, Toronto), truly the book of a lifetime, some 32 years in the making, 394 pages, with a solid introduction by Robert Creeley. Comprised of 15 serial collections, the book contains the 25 section "Image Nations," comparable to Robert Duncan's "Structure of Rime" series as well as to aspects of his "Passages." For me, Blaser's poetry took on size in *Pell Mell* (Coach House, 1988), in which his conversational erudition and enthusiasm seemed suddenly to be at large, emotionally and imaginatively filling in areas more tentatively set forth in the earlier collections (or now parts of what seems to be both a "collected poems" and a long poem). The last 100 pages of *The Holy Forest* are as heady as anything I have read for years, and for those who have been fortunate enough to hear Robin Blaser in a reading/lecture, which is at the same time "performance art" of the highest level, *The Holy Forest* will echo with his unforgettable presence. Coach House should now do his Collected Essays.

While it was published in 1992, I want to say a word about Jackson Mac Low's terrific *Pieces O'Six* (Sun & Moon). The book is not only a wonderful introduction to Mac Low as a writer of quasi-narrations with a wide range of strategies and voicings, but contains, in "Pieces o'Six—XXIV," one of the most dazzling tours-de-force of aphorisms ever written. Read against Blake's "Proverbs of Hell" and Stevens' "Adagia," it seems to gleefully dance about both, volatile, insightful, and with rhythmic phrase placements that are simply breathtaking.

The sense of wit in Paul Violi's poetry—most recently *The Curious Builder* (Hanging Loose), the title poem of which appeared in *Sulfur*—reminds me of Dennis Norton's (of the BBC's *My Word* program): the unexpected as the pivot in any expectation, with a sense of hilaritas as the ever-vanishing circumference. Anything is game for Violi, from a coffin splinter to a fireworks catalog. Especially notable are his adaptations of list/found object materials, such as police blotters, first edition catalogs, and erratas. Plus the work has genuine, emotional depth.

—CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

The Fiction of the Poet: by Anna Balakian; Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, N.J., 1992.

On the page preceding the table of contents is printed this quotation from Mallarmé:

> To end up in a beautiful book/ that is what the world was made for

and our clue to the dedicatory mind that directs *The Fiction of the Poet.*

Balakian selects five poets: Valéry, Rilke, Yeats, Stevens, Guillén. The basis of this selection is their relationship and debt to Symbolism. This is the ontology of a book bearing a joyfully confusing title.

In *The Fiction of the Poet* does she mean to discuss poets who write fiction, or the attachment of fiction to poetry, or is poetry the only "true fiction"? I believe she wishes to show us by her interpretation of texts poetry influenced by Symbolism maturing under the protectorate of Mallarmé and undergoing a removal from all mundaneity until ionized it reaches the purity of fiction. That is as clearly as I can define her position.

I am impressed by how her exceptional intelligence—not intuition—hers is a practical mind—dignifies and gives weight to, even as it exalts, the poetic process.

Balakian's earlier book on André Breton proved to be an intensification of a progress through the mind of the poet. She did not present him as a poet maudit, a silly old fool, a lapsed Communist, or even a genius, she took

on the difficult task of making him human. She really cares about the unenclosed world of modernism to which he was dedicated and which she is able to present as an enchanted world with all the difficulties of enchantment. Swedenborg, Voltaire, Mythology, an odd lot seen together, are tickets to this world we may see as a passing one, but not to Balakian, as her book so brilliantly affirms.

There is nothing ephemeral about her method. She views poets with a kind of abrupt practicality; they are not going to play any tricks on her, even as she reveres their presence. This attitude is assisted by her control of her material. There is a certainty about everything Balakian offers us. She never nods and she takes the hurdles of her dislikes nobly.

And the "no nonsenseisms": "long-winded like Valéry." Of the sacred cow, Rilke: "Perhaps if we could banish Nietzche and Heidegger from his frame of reference we would reach the heart of Rilke's poetics more directly."

She is generous with her closeness to the poet's subject matter. Sometimes she comes to this subject matter in the guise of an inspired genie. She writes of Yeats' "The Second Coming": "we immediately become suspicious of the ready and obvious meaning of the title." She then proceeds to startle us with the remark that Yeats' poem is as powerful a poem about human failure as Mallarmé's "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui." We learn that in the gyre, the labyrinth of self, the Falconer, the artist twists, dreading his loss of control over his work for when that happens: "the center cannot hold." She writes "when the artist reaches that level of failure he has but one hope—the second chance. . .second coming."

She cannot resist a return to Mallarmé. Nor should she, given the climate of her book. "Mallarmé thought of a work of art as an operation as painful and as risky as giving birth": "Noire, a l'aile saignante et pale, deplumee." [Black with a bleeding and pale wing, deplumed.]

We are made aware that it is Symbolism that occupies the historical space in front of the poets she now approaches: its influence on these poets whether obscure or glaring. We are reminded that her field of honor is Symbolism.

In her chapter on Rilke she tells us that his Fourth Sonnet, about the unicorn is "as total a model of poetic fiction as Mallarmé's Faun, Valéry's La Jeune Parque and Yeats's golden bird of Byzantium" (Bringing together the poets of her book). She reminds us that the dream of Mallarmé was *"to suggest and not to describe."*

In her opinion, Stevens is a "self-conscious poet." And Balakian is so European she complains of, or perhaps one should more politely say notices, "the explicitly *national* quality of Stevens."

For instance she is annoyed with his decking out his poems with French words; she is not in sympathy with him, so she cannot interpret the cloak of Frenchness as a necessity to his poetry in search of a poetic fiction he could not locate in his natural environment. She neglects to take into consideration the roquefort cheese and illicit wine in a suburban yard, those mediocre French paintings as patient devices to whittle away the Puritanic self.

Balakian is possibly disturbed by the elevation of Stevens even as she hands over the American crown. On ornery terms with this book she is nevertheless consistent in allowing Stevens, with his lien on Symbolism, into her iconoframe.

The Hero in this unravelling of heroics, as we now know, is Mallarmé. And it is well to read Balakian's book in particular for Balakian's study of his work: Mallarmé who told us "the true fiction is that of the poet." He also wrote and she quotes:

> . . .situated at the junctions of all the other
> arts, sprung from them and governing
> them, Fiction or Poetry. . .

She asks us to celebrate Mallarmé as the poet who "recognized and he opened up the process of creating that fiction." In reaching for this flower "absent from all bouquets" we are in the singular field or mountain top of pure poetic creation.

The roots of this absent flower Balakian locates in Symbolism, the magic marker of her book. The reader must prepare in *The Fiction of the Poet* to accept Symbolism as the bartered bride of Modernism.

—BARBARA GUEST

The Demon of The Demon of Analogy

"Too much insight can be very dangerous, because you can tear your mind apart," insists one schizophrenic patient. Madness is a metaphysical illness; not a radical rupture with the human condition, but rather a manifestation of the paradoxes inherent in the recesses of self-reflective consciousness. Madness is a function of an equivocal, extreme hyperreflexion. Michel

Foucault characterized modern, i.e., post-Kantian, consciousness as an "empirico-transcendental doublet," where the limits of reflective experience occasionally lead to the pathological separation of the empirical and the transcendental, as well as to the equivocation between object and subject, finitude and infinitude, self-abjection and self-deification.

It is precisely these "paradoxes of the reflexive" which characterize the core of both schizophrenia and the modern, indeed modernist, episteme. Such is the thesis of Louis Sass' *Madness and Modernism* (Basic Books, 1992), in which the structural parallels between schizophrenic symptoms, modernist art, and modern philosophy are analyzed, following an extremely detailed, phenomenologically oriented typology of schizophrenic symptomatology. This work operates as an Apollonian polemic against the myriad theories in which schizophrenia is taken to be either a degenerative condition or a Dionysian celebration. It is thus a welcome addition to the current attempts to reveal the profound influence of madness on modernist art, and the breadth of its examples and comparisons make it an extremely useful volume. (The symptomatological categories are: unreality, the separated self, cognitive slippage, distance disturbances, extreme inwardness, loss of self, morbidity, world catastrophe.) Yet the difficulties this book raises and embodies are profound.

Epistemology. The key rhetorical strategy of the book is analogical (or metaphorical), yet one side of the analogy is forced, for this is a book on schizophrenia. Thus the presentation of modernism is highly skewed to reveal mainly such connections, flattening out modernism into a sort of glorified symptomatology. Clearly, the difficulties of excerpting and the consequent decontextualization are serious. The problems of this position become apparent if we play the mental game of reading the analogy from the other side, *i.e.*, if we imagine the book to have been written from the point of view of modernist art and aesthetics as a whole. In this case, to complete the analogy, we would need to supplement the theme of schizophrenia with the symptoms of hysteria, aphasia, autism, the various neuroses, etc., in order to account for the range of stylistic, affective and conceptual features of modernist art and literature.

Methodology. The book simultaneously benefits and suffers from an apparently manic erudition: its 600 pages include over 1200 highly detailed notes, covering 150 pages. Given what seems to be a desire for all-inclusiveness, certain omissions only highlight the occasional tendentiousness of Sass' arguments, leading to a disturbing historiography. To list just a few: How is it possible that Lacan is completely omitted, given not only his central role in the psychoanalytic theorization of schizophrenia, and not only his vast influence on contemporary aesthetic theory, but especially given the fact that the relations between madness and modernism were already evident at the origins of his writing, in the 1933 text published in

Minotaure, "Le problème du style et la conception psychiatrique des formes paranoïaques de l'expérience"? How is it that the psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni, who was among the first to conceptualize the writings of the insane as a distinct literary genre, is never mentioned? Why are those who contributed most to the study of the plastic works of the insane, such as Michel Thévoz and Arnulf Rainer, absent, as is the entire question of Art Brut? Why isn't the work of Laing, Guattari, or Deleuze given greater emphasis, as precursors of his own insistence on the significance of the expressions of the insane? Why is there no consideration of that other, most horrendous, demonic, anti-modernist use of this same analogy between madness and modernism, the Nazi concept of "Degenerate Art"?

Diagnostics. As the extensive parallels show, it is nearly impossible to determine whether any given enunciation—taken outside of the existential situation of the speaker—is art or madness. At the same time, one (madness) does not preclude the other (art). But why, then, is so much weight given to the enunciations of anonymous patients, while the works of such great schizoid or schizophrenic artists as Scriabin, Wölfli, Aloïse Corbaz, Wolfson, etc., are not analyzed? Certainly, given the existential situation of the author (Professor of Clinical Psychology), it is not strange that the reductionisms in this book tend towards the psychological, rather than the aesthetic. Thus, for example, Sass is perplexed that Schreber, in *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, seems to believe in the very gods he hallucinates: "By now it should be clear that Schreber's whole world of nerves and rays virtually demands to be read as a psychological rather than a cosmological vision, as a kind of allegory of the divided state of Schreber's own hyperaware, acutely reflexive mind." (p. 258) But why not simultaneously, equivocally, read these memoirs as an historically belated heretical theology? Or as literature (which a whole tradition of Schreber scholarship, elided by Sass, attempts)? Or as that epitome of modernist thought sought by Sass in the first place? We are caught in the vicious hermeneutic circle of the diagnostics of schizophrenia, a realm not unlike that of Alice's Wonderland, where the rules of the game (symptomatology) are in constant flux, and the game is controlled by dint of (the doctor's) authorial position.

This condition of reflexive paradox is wonderfully and frighteningly expressed by one patient: "If you abstract yourself far enough from a given context you seem somehow to create a new kind of concretion." This is not only true of madness and modernism, as Sass so elegantly demonstrates, but it has always been true of self-consciousness. It is also true, ironically, for Sass' book, which might perhaps benefit a bit from the expiatory powers of an exiled Dionysus, whose wrath modernism also teaches.

*

Were we to continue on this theme, we could cite Artaud's desire, exclaimed in, *The Theater and Its Double*, "to reintroduce on stage a little breath of that great metaphysical fear." It is this breath, this voice, which comes to life throughout Paule Thévenin's *Antonin Artaud, ce Désespéré qui vous parle* (Le Seuil, 1993), a collection of essays written by the person responsible for the immense task of editing Artaud's complete works. *(N.b.*, that the final volumes of the *Oeuvres complètes* still haven't appeared, due to the scandalous, unresolved lawsuit brought by Artaud's inheritors against Gallimard and Thévenin.) These essays are of great interest not only for their insights about the reception of Artaud's work, and not only for the intimate firsthand knowledge of his work, but especially for their occasionally anecdotal beauty. We learn, for example, of the "breath exercises" Artaud utilized to practice for his readings, and which he in turn taught Thévenin. This is of particular import regarding the posthumous publication of Artaud's texts, insofar as Thévenin explains that the typographic layout of Artaud's manuscripts very often didn't follow the form of the manuscripts, since Artaud was limited by the varied and often inadequate formats of the pages on which he wrote. Rather, Thévenin attempted the restitution of the oral/aural exigencies of the work, following her own practice of Artaud's verbal techniques.

But the book is most passionate in its anecdotes, unfortunately all too rare. We may be touched to learn that on the day of Artaud's death, his old friend, Jean Paulhan, arrived and placed a small bouquet of violets in Artaud's hand. But even more precious is the description of the bouquet Artaud offered Thévenin one day, commenting on each flower: at its center were two roses, one white, one pink; above were placed three carnations, yellow, red, and mottled red/white; a fire-red and a pink dahlia; two white china asters to the right and left, and a pink one at the bottom; with the entire bouquet surrounded by oak and asparagus branches. One can only wonder about the symbolism of this arrangement, if any; one can only wish that this book, fascinating as it is, would have rather been presented in the form of memoirs, so that more of these precious reminiscences would survive. But Artaud's great gift to Paule Thévenin (one which Jean Genet characterized as poisoned, but which is rather homeopathic) was the responsibility for his works. This is the gift to which she has devoted her life, and which she has offered us.

*

I recently received word of the death last Autumn of Paule Thévenin (1923-1993), and I wish to record my gratitude for her editorial work on the complete writings of Artaud. We are totally indebted to her passionate

dedication and exemplary scholarship for making Artaud's work accessible. In 1946, upon Artaud's return to Paris from Rodez, his friends obtained suitable living arrangements for him at the clinic of Dr. Delmas in the Parisian suburb of Ivry, and it was here that Paule Thévenin, at that time a psychiatric intern, met Artaud for the first time. Artaud befriended her, and asked her help in typing his recently completed manuscripts; this was the beginning of her selfless dedication to his work. For upon Artaud's death, she saved all of his manuscripts and drawings, and was soon entrusted by Gallimard with editing the *Oeuvres complètes*, with which she was to be occupied for the rest of her life. Outrageously, her name does not appear on the 25 already published volumes, due to difficulties stemming from the continued animosity and meddling of Artaud's inheritors. For the same odious and exasperating reasons, she never got to see the publication of the final volumes (already edited, yet unpublished due to the continuing court case). Yet it was Paule Thévenin who was totally responsible for transcribing Artaud's nearly illegible handwriting, deciphering erasures and palimpsests, choosing from variants, editing the volumes, and providing precise and copious scholarly notes. For this sacrifice, for this travail, for this pleasure, no recognition is great enough.

—ALLEN S. WEISS

THE END. Fanny Howe. Littoral Books, P.O. Box 481170. Los Angeles, Ca. 90048. 96 pp.

Neither recognizably traditional nor (quite) experimental, Fanny Howe is a difficult poet to categorize. She, herself, seems to have no use for categories as she implies in her poem, "Veteran," when she writes

> Outdoors, indoors, I don't believe in a gridlock of ripples
> or the deep walls people live inside

This difficulty may have prevented her from getting the kind of recognition she deserves.

Now Littoral Books has published a new collection of Howe's poetry: *The End*. At first glance, the poems here may seem to be near traditional lyrics. The first person pronoun abounds as do the subjects of loss and

death. The "speaking subject" is not displaced by a postmodern pastiche—but neither is she celebrated or sentimentalized. Perhaps identity isn't problematized because it is both inescapable and irrelevant in the wintry endscape Howe creates. What (but everything and nothing) are the problems of identity to "a sweetheart/of the iceberg or wings lost at sea?" There is no familiar rest stop here. Not even that of despair.

Never has a book been more aptly named. Although the earliest poems—"Alsace-Lorraine" and "The Real Thing" were written fifteen years ago and most of the other poems are recent, they seem one long meditation on a universe in which "cosmic expansion has gone in its preferred direction," tearing things and persons apart. Individual poems argue with or continue one another in this meditation across the months and years. This is a lone voice, speaking (singing even) in extremity, almost beyond human ties, from a place where even language threatens to break down. "Good Friday Night" begins,

> Has my father abandoned me? Or what do I mean
> my father has abandoned me

First she is abandoned by family and/or deity and then by the question itself. This is one of many abandonments the book presents:

> So heaven is a word
> for wonder
> and a term for separation's horror.

Again it is not merely the separation from others *(that* is assumed), but the separation of a word ("heaven") from any clear sense of its meaning which produces horror. In her linguistic dramatization of a negative theology, Howe reminds me of Dickinson. In "Close Up" nouns dematerialize along with things and sparrows are turned into "sparrowings," shaken aside by a line of traffic.

One can't characterize these poems as a series of lamentations either. Howe dismisses the world (its objects, rituals and dogmas) as actively as it withdraws:

> I don't believe in a thousand flowers or the first robin
> of the year or statues made of dust. Some of the others do

She dismisses each form in her quest for "the One that moves around each form." It is this tension between the feeling of bereavement and the impulse to flee which gives the book its energy.

Paradoxically, each thing Howe dismisses is simultaneously created in the reader's mind by the beauty of her language. (The one thing she seems to believe in wholeheartedly is the music of words). She is herself, as she writes, "Ms. Abandon hidden among surprises."

The End may not be as explicitly religious as Howe's previous books, *Introduction to the World* and *The Vineyard,* but she is still preoccupied with theological questions and she points out the trap inherent in her impatience with worldly comfort when she writes,

> If this world isn't good enough for us,
> then an afterlife won't be enough.

Refusing to idolize either presence or absence, Howe is left with the whirlwind of her mind—her poems. They are certainly "good enough" for the most impatient reader. At the close of the millennium, many of us find ourselves tired of our things, our images and our categories. We are ready for *The End.*

—RAE ARMANTROUT

Peter Quartermain, *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe* (Cambridge University Press, 1992)

This is a book with a refrain. I'll play a few bars:

—"Meaning is problematic for each of the writers discussed in these essays, and it is precisely that problem which makes their work so intransigent and attractive." (9)

—"Stein's writing assaults clarity by suggesting that clarity is itself an assault upon and hence a violation of the sheer complexity and richness of a sensory world whose 'chaotic plenitude' (Jayne Walker's phrase) cannot be verbally articulated or mapped." (21)

—"Energy can never be fully contained or understood. Neither can knowledge, the life of the perceptions. And the poet can never carry the

reader all the way in, to the poem: There must be a resistance, for the act of knowing occurs only in the doing—and it is only then that meaning, or its possibility, can arise." (59)

—"The text is a movement of languages, of *a number of* frames of reference, held in the language of the poem simultaneously, *at once*. And it is a *felt* world, which is not, therefore, to be interpreted; one's feelings are not subject to exegesis." (88)

—"Both Zukofsky and Joyce wind in as many meanings as possible; both consequently cultivate an opacity of text—for if the text is to contain the world, then it must, like the world, in its quiddity stubbornly resist the hermeneutic act. . . ." (108)

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Well then, these are propositions concerning the objectivist "line" that is the subject of Quartermain's book, with "objectivist" and "line" understood to be conveniences: Stein, Williams, Zukofsky, Bunting, Creeley, Duncan, Davenport, Howe. We mostly know the catchwords and concepts and intellectual history: opacity; the word as thing; thinking rather than thought; Spinoza not Descartes; process; parataxis; refusal of hierarchies; "a poem is a desirable thing" (121). Quartermain's a fine close reader, a friend of poets, secret agent slogging the sublime. Most poets I know would benefit from his discussions of technique, of consonant clusters slowing the speed of verse, for instance, of quantity in Whitman, Pound, and Bunting, and so forth. Erudite too, like his friend Guy Davenport, and capable of adducing the same arcane reference. A stylist, an essayist, though less astringent than some of his subjects, bordering even on enthusiasm. "Exegesis should not be necessary" (89) he writes, echoing several of his subjects, and that may be true, but still this is useful criticism, entertaining reading. The discussion of a *apo koinou*—syntactic play and line breaks—is itself worth the price of the book.

If I have reservations about the book, they have less to do with Quartermain himself than with the poets he has set out to celebrate. These constitute for Quartermain an alternative tradition within or outside of high modernist poetics. Essentially American, mostly cut free of the cultural baggage of European traditions, particularly English traditions, these are poets inhabiting a world "in which masterpieces are no longer recognizable and works of art no longer identifiable, a world without authority, and, for the non-English speaking immigrant to America, a world without any history except that which the immigrant carries. . ." (15). Basil Bunting can belong in this crowd because as a Northumbrian he is outside the

linguistically homogenizing, "purifying" force of the English center, which has had its American spokespersons, like Henry James and T. S. Eliot. We've had critics try to split modernist poetics down the middle before—I think of Peter Bürger, Charles Russell, and others who distinguish an anti-institutional avant-garde from a larger, culturally and politically conservative modernism—but Quartermain is distinctive for offering a thesis about modernism which originates in hard empirical statistics about immigration rather than in a post-Hegelian Frankfurt School abstraction about the social function of art. Quartermain's is a more provocative thesis, if finally also a little reductive, especially when he tries to discuss the consequences of the immigrant experience in poetic technique. I am not sure it follows, for instance, that skepticism about "referentiality" and "meaning" such as is evident in so many of these poets is the product of the American experience—of a plurality of languages and a mongrelization of cultures and cultural standards. For one thing, that would seem to leave too much of that part of the European avant-garde which was also skeptical of "referentiality" and "meaning" out of the picture. I am also not sure whether or not it's ever much more than rhetoric to speak of America's weak sense of history or "culture," for one always runs the risk of seeming to advocate an anti-intellectualism that can be dangerous. (That's the problem, for instance, with taking Jean Baudrillard's work seriously as analysis of American culture rather than as rhetoric directed at the French.) And the healthy skepticism of the writers Quartermain celebrates did not preclude a scholarly pursuit of knowledge—what was Zukofsky doing digging around in Jefferson, for instance? Has there ever been a writer more interested in the traditions of Europe than Guy Davenport? Unless of course it's Ezra Pound, who occupies a curious position in this book—as he does in most studies trying bravely to make a clean division between a high modernism and something else. Pound seems to have been ambivalent about the energies of cultural mongrelization (see "Patria Mia"), interested in trashing Europe or in rescuing the best of it depending on whom he was talking to. But I digress. So American this book! So intent on slapping London in the face—and written by a Canadian! I only wonder if, as Americans, we should be so proud of our barbarism, our anti-culture? Should we be so eager to give over the pursuit of meaning just because totalizing narratives are out of fashion? Of course we've heard that totalizing systems, all narratives are to be feared: *everybody knows*.

As I said, this is finally a complaint about Quartermain's poets; but he is their advocate. I'll confess that while I don't need Quartermain to convince me that Zukofsky is opaque, I do need something more than this book to convince me that his work does not often reek of the pedantic. For me Bunting, Creeley, Howe, Duncan, and Williams are essential reading, and I'm grateful to Quartermain for helping me learn a little about how to

read them more intelligently. But for me Stein's in need of sentencing, Zukofsky's *"A"* too: it may be my own limitations that prevent me from imagining anyone reading them at any length with pleasure. I'd be happy for doses much smaller than I'm typically offered—with Zukofsky, I prefer the short poems, as did Bunting. And I find myself even while awash bedazzled in the textures of sound and rhythm, pursuing "meaning."

—KEITH TUMA

Some notes on Zukofsky's *80 Flowers* and Michele J. Leggott's *Reading Zukofsky's "80 Flowers"* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989)

Let's be clear at the outset: Leggott's is one of the most important studies yet written on Zukofsky and the processes of his work, and no one seriously reading him should ignore it. No other has used the manuscript material to such extent or examined these poem so exhaustively. For the methods of Zukofsky's composition; for reading the *80 Flowers* and as importantly *"A"*-22 and 23; for the "late poetic" informing all three and how they relate to the whole body of work (and thus for reading that entirety); and for the grounding of all this in Zukofsky's life, especially while we still lack a biography, this is a crucial work. It is not easy to go through. There's no shortcut. It can't be skimmed. With little preamble we are plunged straight into a close-knit and demanding presentation, consonant with the work itself, of some of the most difficult poetry of one of the most difficult poets of the 20th century. To try to read the analysis of any one poem without first going through the account of what the manuscript materials involve and how the work grew out of what came before is to have to go back and reattend. The discussion is both cumulative and distributive, new important information for the whole constantly being brought forth and related forward and back.

As explication it is striking, admirable, exemplary. Of course it still leaves questions and will prompt disagreements, as any work on Zukofsky will. But the sheer amount of information of all sorts on Zukofsky embedded in it is remarkable. It does not, however, really ever deal with the "Z world"

in terms other than Zukofsky's. "It is not a very critical book," succinctly notes Alan Riach in his muchly appreciative review in *Landfall.* The premises of that world are not actually questioned. It is not a matter of whether Zukofsky is important enough to be *worth* all this analysis. Or whether he should be given such "microscopic, laborious scrutiny" when his place in the critical assessment of American literature has not yet been adequately established and he is still not that widely known, as Michael André Bernstein is worried about in his review in *Modern Philology* (these two and the excellent account in *Style* by Dave Oliphant, an editor at the Humanities Research Center in Austin where Zukofsky's papers reside, are the only substantive reviews I've run down). Perhaps it is true as Bernstein argues, that "nothing really indicates that Leggott either cares about or even knows how to formulate the terms" of such a question as how Zukofsky challenged many of the assumptions of Pound's modernism, though that seems rather overstated. Whatever criticism needs to be done, having Leggott's foundation work will undoubtedly help bring it about, will in fact provoke it. With work of such difficulty, all the assistance we can get is needed. It seems excessive to expect Leggott on top of over 400 pages of close analysis to dispute the place of Zukofsky in the canon, or to have set aside her ground-breaking research in the first place to argue this. (For my own sense of that I would simply rest with Robert Duncan in the Zukofsky *Paideuma:* "to bear testimony to the enduring resource: his work. . .stands as primaries of all of us at work in the closing decades of the Twentieth Century.") But Zukofsky's work is of a stature that demands we also begin to ask questions about it that the terms in which it was conceived and composed do not necessarily present (and the same is true of Duncan's)—*while* examining the important matter of how it fulfills itself. Where we are with it after identifying and explaining all we can.

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80 Flowers: Zukofsky's last completed poetic text (a special legacy it feels, an even more concentrated and unresolved way of passing on the accumulated knowledge of a lifetime; compare, for all their differences, Jaime de Angulo's American Indian tales for children told on KPFA at the end of his life). Leggott tells us that Zukofsky first considered what became the book in 1968 (a cryptic note citing the Greek word *artos:* bread—out of which eventually came the "Heart us" opening the Epigraph and the *flour/flower* link, and *anthos/anthology,* leading to the title). Growing from work on the two last-written movements of *"A"* (he once considered ending *"A"*-23 with just a list of the 80 flowers), the set was first formally planned in 1974, nine days after the completion of *"A"*-23, a schema, variously added to, under the headings of *Plan, Substance* and *Form* (something

Zukofsky had done his whole poetic career, the explicit formal projecting and then the fulfilling of a work—*"A"*, as Barry Ahearn points out in his book, was planned in advance in the mid-late-1920s to consist of precisely 24 movements, the plan set down as that for *80 Flowers* on one small piece of paper). Conceived as songs to be completed for his own 80th birthday (in Pythagorean terms, full age), the poems were to cover only flowers he had actually seen (but there are two exceptions, or at least with the second what Zukofsky thought was an exception: #49 Slipperwort and #54 Windflower); to be arranged chronologically in order of composition, following the seasons they also celebrate, to come out of and condense all his previous work; with special attention to numerical matters (the 8x5=40 of words and lines, the 9s of the 81, etc.) and their significances, as had always been central in his work (a major part of the schema deals with this—whether one would call it *numerology*, strictly speaking, that is to what degree it is systematic, can be argued, and it is a subject worth consideration, but there is certainly a continual concern throughout the work with number symbolism and the patterns of counting around and through which the poems are composed, a kind of magic, it may be, so far as it goes, of the *constraints of desire*, to use Jack Winkler's term, or perhaps as simply as Hugh Kenner has it in his study of *Ulysses:* 'Numbers are definite; whatever is sufficiently definite attracts correspondences'); and proposing already a subsequent work, *Gamut: 90 Trees*, to carry him to the year 2000, one poem of which survives. Written between 1974 and 1978 (taking six years less than allowed for), at the proof stage when Zukofsky died in May 1978 (it is curious that the choice of the printer, the Stinehour Press in Vermont, had been at the suggestion of John Cage), the book was published the following month by his widow, Celia, in an edition of 80 copies (at $150 each).

80 Flowers: a title in which every possible sense of both terms is at work (it is worth looking at a full-scale dictionary for the array), not the least that *flowers* of course may be a verb. Zukofsky must also have considered all the aspects of the numeral in its Roman form, *LXXX* as perhaps *Louis' Xs (unknowns*, or *excess),* or *Louis' unknown times/by unknown?* And *80* can be read as an upright infinity sign next to zero, that *gamut*—where the span of the opening and closing words of the whole set (Jane Wodening's "secret title" of a book) takes us from 'Heart' to 'night,' 'Heart us' to 'white night.'

80 Flowers: a set of *81 poems* (a titleless Epigraph in addition to the titled 80—there are always exceptions, as though spirit openings, to the formal terms Zukofsky proposes); each of *eight* (no exceptions here) *punctuationless* (except for hyphens, apostrophes, both for possessives and for contractions; accent marks, both grave and aigu; quote marks, both single and

double; the macron and the breve—but no commas, periods, colon, semicolons, or dashes; nothing to impede the possibilities of flow but line breaks) *five-word lines* (sometimes four, as straightaway in the Epigraph; sometimes six; once, in #45 Chicory, seven—22 of the 81 have at least one irregular line; and "word" here varies from as short as 'a' or 's', or the digit of a numeral, or 'etc'—but there is no 'I' in the whole sequence, surely making it more unique than rare in recent poetry—all the way to hyphenated conglomerates of as many as five terms, some open at either end, as 'of-the-valley', 'or-'; with many compounds run together hyphenless, as 'fanswordleaves', or with elisions, as 'gulp'm', 'foam't'—word count not syllable count is the measure, and the accordion-like variety of what constitutes a word is one of the major operative conceptions of the poems—intensifying the syntax *inside* the words, as Jed Rasula said of Joyce, not only between); with *capital letters* (the first word of every poem is capitalized; beyond these and month names, caps are unpredictable, but then nothing is really predictable in the whole series, certainly not the next word); with *italics* (no comprehensive explanation to cover *all* the occurrences of italics has been proposed by anyone I've read; they clearly have to do with counterpoint and stress, distinguishing and singling out, at least conceptually and to the eye—I've never heard the one tape of Zukofsky reading from *80 Flowers,* to know whether or how he may have sounded the italics; other evidence would indicate he was not necessarily attentive to line breaks in reading aloud); of spare yet massive and dense—at the same time light, airy, quick—semantic, syntactic, and etymological *polyvalence,* extreme and concentrated metalepsis, the words possible, ideally at least, to be read in any order within a poem; and of a *sound* unlike anything else in the language (though there are definitely analogues in *Ulysses,* as especially at the end of the "Oxen of the Sun" episode, not even to get into the *Wake),* clearly related to but still quite distinct from his previous efforts in a like direction—given much familiarity at all, no one would likely confuse even the most apparently similar portions of the Catullus translations or *"A"*-22 or 23 with *80 Flowers:* "quillet praises lacquer truemustard ox-beef" (#10 Charlock Per Winkle); "gnar's th'sum talk's shrill pine" (#43 Lilies); "Coo-saw kin-ens sees seas season" (#57 Dogwood) *"eyebright* monkeshines monkey-wrench whitespotted eyetooth" (#74 Aloe, and the longest line in the set). (He does like spondees.)

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Some parallels. Robert Duncan's *Headlines* that conclude his Stein imitation "Sensational News" (c. 1953) in the 1967 Duncan *Audit/Poetry* are arranged in a grid of eight unpunctuated predominantly five-word lines (varying from four to six), with such as "MAKE ALTER WIDOW TO

WINDOW." The visual similarity is striking, but the likeness would seem purely fortuitous? (It is nonetheless worth considering how and why this may have come about, and especially the Stein link.) And there are the 6x6 word-grids (with a 2x2 outrider after the opener) beginning and concluding Duncan's 1964 "The Fire" in *Bending the Bow,* which Zukofsky certainly would have seen. The difference in total conception, however, even in terms of sound kinship, even with intentional imitations, between Zukofsky and any other example I can think of in post-Zukofsky writers who have clearly derived from him, and there are many possible examples, still seem pretty much complete (there is of course David Melnick's application of Zukofsky's Catullus translation methods to the *Iliad* in his wonderful 1983 *Men in Aida,* and then his fantastic *Pcoet,* published three years *before 80 Flowers,* which takes us into another dimension altogether: "outcat lode hemepdne"; but actual structural similarity?). In terms of layout and composition within rigorously imposed restrictions, there is the set of inscriptions Valéry produced in 1937 for the Palais de Chaillot (one wing of which is the Musée de l'Homme): four groups of five lines each, with not more than 37 letters to a line and no punctuation. Valéry did not consider these poetry, but as Roger Shattuck says in *The Innocent Eye,* they come "tantalizingly close to poetry." And we might imagine Zukofsky's 81 poems also carved in stone, to be set in a garden—they are certainly of an American lapidary, what we have of that. But Valéry's pieces are of great simplicity, clearer in syntax than probably anything else he wrote, nothing in that regard like Zukofsky's, except that every word counts, and the monumentality. And their instructions might be telling us of work such as Zukofsky's: "AMI N'ENTRE PAS SANS DESIR." Another parallel comes to mind, perhaps tenuous as well, but one that John Thorpe has also remarked on, and that is with five-character classical Chinese *shih* poetry, "regulated verse", which is also of eight-line units. Though Zukofsky's flowers do not show any analogous rhyme, tone, or couplet-parallelism patterns, Peter Boodberg's statement (in his *Selected Works,* 180) that "one of the potent Chinese poetic devices is positional bifunctionalism" clearly fits Zukofsky, only perhaps altering bi- to multi-. And certainly one could argue for some linguistic kinship, or convergence—though born less than a year apart, it is probably unlikely they read one another?—between Zukofsky's late poetry and the concerns evidenced in Boodberg's translations, to find words as densely polysignificant etymologically as possible; cf. his version of *Shih Ching* (177), and the absolutely *extraordinary* translation at the conclusion of his discussion of *Lao Tzu* 1 (480)—there is nothing else like *that* in all of sinology. One could do far worse in sharpening attentions, to deal with Zukofsky or whatever, than to spend some time with Boodberg's *Cedules* and *Lao Tzu* notes. (We should also remember that Boodberg was one of Duncan's teachers, and that one of Duncan's late poems, "Two Sets

of Ten" of 1981, mentions both Zukofsky and Boodberg in its prefacing note and works throughout with a number count Duncan felt analogous to Zukofsky's and to Homer's. Two other late Duncan poems that have Zukofsky in mind might also be mentioned while we're at it: the *Passages* poems "Jamais", designated *"Homage to the youthful Zukofsky,"* and "With In", part of *The Regulators.)*

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Of Zukofsky's *most* hermetically daunting and difficult work, and may likely remain so, even with all elucidation (no one would call *"A"*-18 and 19 easy or for all their length prolix, but after immersion in 22 and 23 and especially *80 Flowers*, they may seem expansively intelligible and almost loquacious by comparison): "a black hole. . .an impossible density few will ever attempt to penetrate," Eliot Weinberger registered it a decade ago. But of course the impossible is always an attraction (and the poems do have their attractions, and not just as intriguing puzzles or fantastic sound and vocabulary combinations), so attempts have been and continue to be made. The first in print was David Levi Strauss' "Approaching *80 Flowers"* in the *Code of Signals* volume Michael Palmer edited for North Atlantic Books in 1983. It is an admirable introduction to the work, perhaps still the best place to begin, the record of a serious and imaginative reading of the poetry when nothing else was available to go on, "no critical mass to contend with," showing an attention to the prosody of how sounds structure the poems independently of how the sounds may have been generated or what they may relate to that Leggott does not really go into, and importantly grounded personally in Levi's own experience as a gardener. And I've also been in touch with a study group of poets in Bolinas who have met regularly to consider *80 Flowers*, as they did earlier with the Cantos, Maximus, Stein, from which one hopes for tangible results in the future. (And then there is the impromptu explication of #80 Zinnia which Robert Duncan produced during his interchange with Barrett Watten at the Art Institute in San Francisco in 1978, which exists on tape but never has been, to my knowledge, transcribed?)

And now Leggott's monumental study (based on her 1985 dissertation at the University of British Columbia), with prefacing material, appendices, notes, bibliography and index adding up to over 450 pages. It might be likened to a super-double-intensive crash course in a new language (some might even say an overload indoctrination), and Zukofsky's poetry itself to the "translation" of multiple simultaneous languages into what is not so much (or better *not just)* a common language as what Robert Duncan called (in a different context) "the uncommon language of a highly personal

signature," one as Leggott says, "new, difficult (but not alien)" (89)—but with resonances for use wherever, in concord with Heraclitus that an unapparent connection may be stronger than an apparent one. Or we might say, and with all praise intended, that Leggott's book is an instruction or user's manual (and given that Zukofsky made his living for some years editing such, it is apt). And one like no other. Some may learn a new language as Arthur Waley did *(two* in his case), by simply holing up and doing it alone, but most of us will need and welcome assistance. Ultimately of course the learning and the use must come down to our individual experience.

The kinds of difficulties in Zukofsky—what is hidden, sources and allusions and meanings compacted and elided beyond recognizing, connections "barely clinked", in Duncan's phrase, barely traceable, or simply private—mean that such materials as the manuscript notes, lists, drafts that Leggott bases her study on, which make such identifications and chart the processes of use, *do* help (from the two pages reproduced in the Zukofsky *Paideuma* one may judge what must be involved in deciphering them), as the manuscripts of other poets might not (my guess is that having every manuscript of Lezama Lima's poems, to name another contemporary of Zukofsky's of transcendental difficulty, would still not enable us to read them much if any better, and likewise with Gerrit Lansing). "Conventional wisdom would have it that notes and draft materials are unnecessary to the reading of a poem, and in most cases wisdom has its way—Zukofsky said often enough that paying sufficient attention elucidates a work." But with difficulty of this sort, "of an order to baffle and eventually alienate all but the most persistent of readers," Leggott concludes Zukofsky's solution was to leave behind these manuscripts and "legitimize use of the draft material by housing it in a public collection" (31-32), Zukofsky's "time capsule." So before analyzing the poems, she gives us a very close-grained 30-page account of what these materials are, for *"A"*-22 and 23 as well as for *80 Flowers*, it doesn't do to skip, the basis of all the discussions that follows of how *"A"*-22 and 23 lead into *80 Flowers* (this discussion is in fact the best introduction yet produced to those parts of *"A"*, especially valuable on the "An" sections, and Zukofsky's plan there to cover 6000 years of history without names or dates; the book is worth having just for this). Only then are the *Flowers* looked at in detail, and then in great detail, 36 of the 81, with full texts, in chronological seasonal sequence (only four are discussed out of order).

In some ways the best introduction, and then Levi's account, is to turn straight to Leggott's Appendix B, the transcription of a taped conversation with Hugh Kenner in which Zukofsky explains #22 Bayberry, giving in fine

the methodology Leggott builds on: tracing the sources in his other work; definitions and etymologies in several languages; authors such as Homer, Theophrastus, Dante, Shakespeare; botanical and gardening information; and what is finally, as Zukofsky puts it, "private knowledge." Already in the Levi Strauss many of the major sources Zukofsky drew on were made clear (and his basic approach is as sound as Leggott's, though lacking what she calls the "enrichment" that the manuscript information provides). Leggott expands on all this (and on what Zukofsky does not explain), particularly about what he was reading, from Greeks and Romans to Breck's and Burpee's catalogs, with such surprises as Thomas Hardy, including *The Dynasts*, and Henry James (I wonder if the rhythms of the last two especially may not have served as one of the important sustaining backup counterpoint beats *80 Flowers* rode upon—I remember Creeley 30 years ago talking about writing to hours-long tapes of all the Bud Powell records he could get hold of, but this is something far, far less overt; or Gerrit Lansing more recently speaking of the 19th century prose rhythms, such as Pater's and James', he felt behind but even more *in* Ashbery's *Flow Chart);* and about matters of Zukofsky's family life, the dates, anniversaries, birthdays central in such a number-conscious poetry, the impingement of immediate events (cf. the Vietnam war news on TV in *"A"*-18), and especially the Zukofsky's garden, for the ultimate grounding is the flowers themselves.

It's hard without extended quotation to give an adequate sense of the heaped-up, multilayered, widely-conjecturing ("mindboggling," Charles Bernstein called it) account Leggott gives of the way she has made *through* poems which were not written along any single line of development, changing as they occur, not possible to be read in any conclusive fashion nor meant to be read thus any more than they were written thus, multidimensional sets of different kinds of resting points, momentum, propulsion, linking, merging and emerging points, meaning auras (so the Blakean Rexroth speaking of Zukofsky's "crystal cabinets full of air and angels"). The quality of her account (style as soul) is entirely her own. Here is the opening of her discussion of #75 Thyme (280):

> *'Thyme,' 'rose,' 'thyme';* three maplike italicizations in the *Flower.* Here is the firey rose again, budding flame in winter (Epigraph, #1 Starglow) in front of Isaac D'Israeli's credulous, frozen Norsemen (their eyes popping out?). Here is the 'birds'-tread' dance ('bird tread,' Epigraph), which assumes rose-sense as soon as we step from trefoil (a pulse, or a charm for every good purpose) to cinquefoil (a wild rose), compound leaves in each case looking like bird tracks. For the wild rose,

> bring in wild thyme and wild time, recalling: 'Wild time *liveforever* horsethyme ice' (#4 Liveforever)—the line that also draws on Oberon's 'I know a bank where the wild thyme blows' (*MND* II.ii.249). In #4 Liveforever there was an allusive firey rose and the horse whose time is running (or being run by?) *80 Flowers*. There are no open indications of his presence in #75 Thyme but hints of it abound, from 'time. . .wild. . ./ *thyme*' of the opening to the comical wrapping up ('relentless-vest muffler jacket coat') of his mortal frame against the cold suddenly blowing out of the thymy bank. And then, 'hope sevenyear,' there is his projection of faith in time's design ('but trusts still greet C + me at 80'), which the last line of the poem elaborates.

Crucial throughout is her discerning how certain kinds of operations, just as certain sources, are used again and again. Central to this are the unexpected contingencies of diverse input and awareness, "those places where one voice had been, or seemed to have been, listening to another." "If the mode of Zukofsky's poetry is condensation, its material is the staggering incidence of such contingency" (55). Especially valuable is her showing how Zukofsky's translation methods operate in these poems (and compare the 1964 poem, 'The Translation"). We are familiar from the Catullus translations with Zukofsky's recreating in English the *sound* of the foreign language original, transliterating it (as generating "searing / all cues" from the second term of *Hibiscus syriacus* in #20 Rose-of-Sharon, but this is a simple example; there may be line after line of it, cf. #69 Yarrow—one wonders about the impact of Joyce in all this, for one fairly simple example the "met him pike hoses" from *metempsychosis* in *Ulysses*, again not even venturing into *Finnegan's Wake*, the question of Joyce and Zukofsky is worth study, and not just the matter of the *Ulysses* filmscript, which Jerry Reisman more recently has claimed Zukofsky actually wrote none of), along with translating it for sense (so line 1 of #32 Lilac does both: "Sere ring a pipe wood" first transliterates and then translates *Syringa*). What Leggott demonstrates is that time and again Zukofsky does both, shifting back and forth, with the same original text. Further, within the mode of transliterating for sound are two types, one which more or less accommodates the sense with it and one which has no apparent connection with the original meaning at all, making a total swerve in trajectory. "Both kinds are at work in Zukofsky's late poetry, and a sudden switch to the anti-sensical mode is one of its most disconcerting features. Zukofsky is in the habit of sudden switching" (61). That last sentence is my favorite, and it was worth reading the whole book just to have it, conjuring up an image of Zukofsky as a swinger of birches. And lest that seem merely

whimsical or impertinent, let us remember that the word-root of *birch* means *to shine, bright*, as that of the sound-linked *beech* leads us to *book*, and that *birch* is the first letter of the ancient Irish magical tree-alphabet, and is the tree of inception.

Leggott modestly calls her book simply "research." It is a *creative* act, of remarkable accomplishment. It may be as Hugh Kenner states on the dust jacket, that she has virtually invented a critical method. It does give the feel of having been so long and so deep in the Z world as to have become part of it, with some indulgence appropriating itself to that world. But it too of course comes up again and again against bafflement—which is of the *nature* of that world. "Questions of perception, to which there are no answers, only further complexity, perplexity" (47). Nothing explains *everything* in these poem. As Leggott says, Zukofsky always holds more cards than we do. And so? At length really explain what can't be explained? And in any case, since we still don't have access to that manuscript material, we can't weigh for ourselves how she has used it, nor can we deal in the same fashion with the other 45 poems she doesn't analyze. Will access to the material (not even catalogued when Leggott was working on it and perhaps not still; it is a continuing problem for all rare book libraries) always be restricted to specially qualified and accepted scholars? *Does* this poetry *necessitate* having the manuscripts? Does it not also itself press for a reading that simply *ignores* all that? Is that then any less "authentic"? Isn't that what we ultimately *have* to do? At any rate, to the degree the material *is* crucial, one does want it. At least it would have been very much to the point to have in Leggott's book all of the material relating to *one* of the poems?

To be at the end of Leggott's book is still (as she would agree) to be only at the start of dealing with the world of *80 Flowers*—if one *wants* to deal with it (one friend, a very careful reader, finds it basically trivial). Zukofsky wants the reader to be drawn into his world; not every poet does—but in a very complex push-pull sort of way, nothing easy. The value and use of that has to be what we experience ourselves in actively seeking out the sources and tracing the connections for ourselves, making the links with our own lives. That is obviously true of *any* poetry, but it is most intensely so with this. A friend has written me that he thinks of the *80 Flowers* "more as *case history* or possibly quarries (mines) for others"—then what do we make out of what we extract, and if poets, into our poiesis.

I have come back over the years to one of the two poems in the set Leggott says nothing whatsoever about, #20 Rose-of-Sharon (the other is #60 Narcissus), and there are for me sexual dimensions there I don't know that

Zukofsky had in mind, certainly probably not in the way I have them in mind, particularly with the vivid phrases "the thrown burning brand" and "torn not thorned rose." And there are other dimensions, overtones of the flower itself, which Zukofsky did not get at, did not (I'm sure) want to get at, wasn't interested in, only indirectly made possible links to, and which Leggott wouldn't have gone into had she covered this poem, all of which are nonetheless absolutely central to my experience, and my experience in this poem, and will continue to be so. Let me simply mention the *rose trémière* and all its resonances in Nerval's sonnet, "Artemis," and set that next to #20 Rose-of-Sharon. Meditative texts, then. I wish that Leggott had told us of her own particular personal experience of the poems, especially as a poet—how she came to them first, for example? Which isn't to say her book is not an individual and personal reading, and gains thereby, but the grounding in her practice and life? Outside the Zukofsky world?

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There are some slips, but few (on 334 *"A"*-14 is cited when it should he *"A"*-13; on 352 the date of Dostoyevsky's *White Nights* is given as 1811—he wasn't born till 1821; it should be 1848); there are some references not caught that one might have expected would be (as on 45, not registering the *Annuit Coeptis* and *Novus Ordo Seclorum* mottoes on the Great Seal of the United States—cf. the reverse of the dollar bill—which surely are also operative in the Zukofsky text under discussion, or the further Virgil reference at *Aeneid* IX, 625; and that 17 September is William Carlos Williams' birthday, as well as Constitution Day, never seems to have been recognized as an important factor in the recurrence of that date in Zukofsky's work; note: "A"-17); and is the "T" missing from the lower-right-hand letter list in Zukofsky's note quoted on 41 Zukofsky's own oversight? These are minor, but to be noted. More interesting to wonder about is something else.

When Leggott's book was published in 1989, the only way the common reader could have had "legal" access to the *entirety* of the text being analyzed was to go to a rare book library or know some fortunate collector who had one of the 80 published copies (or even more fortunately be such a collector; no longer then, however, a common reader), or, stretching allowances a bit if not the likely possibilities, come by a Xerox or a copy of a pirate edition (I don't know how many such editions may have appeared; I have seen only one, dated 1987 and clearly marked as "Pirate edition" and "Not for Sale"). Leggott certainly indicates that most readers would have a hard time coming up with *80 Flowers*, and part of the value of her study at that time was clearly in providing the full texts of the poems

covered in detail. But nowhere is the tension gone into inherent in the publishing of a 400-odd-page highly specialized study of a book that was not in print, that was essentially unavailable and had never in any usual sense been available—or that those who would make use of and perhaps buy the Leggott would want and need the full *80 Flowers*. Under such circumstances, the publisher can be commended the more for taking on the project. Perhaps already in 1989 the Johns Hopkins Press had in mind to produce the *Complete Short Poetry* they brought out in 1991; it would seem likely (the more so since they went on to issue the complete *"A"* in 1993), but if this is so it is not indicated in Leggott.

More particularly: if we examine the arrangement of the 81 poems in each of the three versions—the 1978 original, the 1987 pirate, the 1991 collected—we find they are all different. In the original the text (one poem to a page) begins on the unnumbered verso of the dedication page (which reads simply "to C") with the untitled Epigraph, facing #1 Starglow, and the last poem, #80 Zinnia, faces a blank page (the numbers Leggott uses along with the titles to identify the poems—this was Zukofsky's way of referring to them, and with the titles not in quotes—correspond to the page numbers of the 1978 edition; the poems are not otherwise numbered there). This may well have been Zukofsky's preference; we know from Leggott that in his instruction to the printers he specified one poem to a page, the page size, the number of pages, the type (Bembo), and the limiting of the edition to *exactly* 80 copies (and Leggott moreover makes a case for the Epigraph and #1, #2 and #3 being linked pairs, benefiting from facing each other—yet the equally important linked pair, #51 Snowdrop and #52 Snow-wreath, which Zukofsky in his notes designated a highly condensed "double canzone," do *not* face each other thus): but it may have been the printers' actual decision, what is after all the common way of pagination, Zukofsky knew would be followed? In the pirate (apparently derived from a xerox of the 1978 edition, or a xerox of a xerox, with occasional attendant lurchings and blurrings, and thickened letters throughout), the verso of the dedication page is blank and the Epigraph occupies the first recto of text (that would usually be page 1, but here no page number), with #1 on the verso of that, and so on, and thus the 80 flowers *proper* are presented in 40 two-page openings, ending neatly with #79 facing #80. The collected edition presents the 81 poems *three* to a page, 27 pages, beginning and ending on a recto, and of course without the original's page (and thus identifying) numbers (nor are the titles all in caps as in the original). This three-to-a-page arrangement was in fact, Leggott makes clear (5), that of Celia's master-copy typescript, from the carbon of which the Stinehour Press set the type (no indication by Leggott if the poems were numbered in any way in the typescript; presumably not). But obviously that

arrangement was not one the Zukofskys expected the press would reproduce, so the 1991 edition departs from the poet's precise desires for printed representation as they are known. Whatever, leaving out these page/identifying numbers makes for inconvenience in using the 1991 edition with Leggott's book, since her index entries to the main discussions of the 81 poems (plus the arrangement in the full list with dates of composition and manuscript dedications in Appendix A) are in numerical sequence and are not fully cross-referenced by title. So one must add the numbers for the poems in the collected, a minor annoyance but something an editor should have been aware of and handled. Further yet: Leggott (27-28) points out and explains the source of the one typographical error in the 1978 edition: in the first line of #61 Bearded Iris, 'gook' should read "geek" she also, by the way, valuably cites some typos in the now out of print University of California Press *"A"*—see 385, n. 13 and n. 22; I have not been able to examine the new Hopkins complete *"A"* to see if the mistakes have been corrected there). Naturally the pirate doesn't do anything about this, but much more curiously neither does the 1991 edition, though from the same publisher as Leggott's book, not taking advantage of her research, again evidencing some lack of coordination. (There is in fact no indication at all of who edited the new edition or how and why it was done as it was, with no Latin for the Catullus, for example, and many other matters; but that is a subject for another discussion.)

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Questions. Simply to present and raise. Of the movement from public to private (but the private was always there), social and political ground to family ground, labor value to love, *"A"*-9 First Half to Second Half, and its culmination in *80 Flowers?* Years ago after reviewing *Bottom*, I wrote to Zukofsky and asked why there was no Marx in that book, and he replied that he was no more a Marxist, after all, than he was a Spinozaist—but there is more to it than that, and what became of Marx in the work. What is the nature of authority in Zukofsky? Where does he leave off and why; what does he settle for, is satisfied with? What is the nature of the personal canon Zukofsky affirms and how does it change—how is it "privileged" as reference and source? What *are* "particulars"? What is the development of the concept of "word" operative in *80 Flowers?* It is not a poetry of struggle, of anguish, pain, suffering, intense yearning (though of bitterness over neglect), but rather of "the mind's peace"? Except for the struggle of the sheer effort of dealing with the requirements set himself, in the intensity of composition—and the struggle we have in reading. But of the kind of conflict Pound felt made for kinship between his work and Bartók's *Fifth Quartet*, or Faulkner's "the human heart in conflict with itself? What is the

nature of resolution (till death's) within a poetry composed to be unresolved (life itself)—is it "within"? Able to be unresolved because the real "resolution" the poetry rests upon, what supports contingency, is already present, in love, marriage, family, or an ideal of these (so the attraction for many poets, such as Duncan and Creeley, of the domestic in Zukofsky, the artist's household)? And aspiration? The reaffirming of an art, a continuing curiosity, a yearning for more learning? Wanting a fame not gained or granted? And the paradise vision (which is a garden) at the heart of the late work, marriage ever-renewed, "impossible liveforever." How is it ever attained? (What might the next set of poems after *trees* have dealt with, of like presence—birds?) Creeley concludes his Foreword to the 1991 *Complete Short Poetry:* "What end can there be? He might say otherwise, it is finally quite simple. Either you love or you hate. You have your life accordingly, 'the more so all have it.'" Yet is it simple, since we do both, are mixed. And the result from either in any case is not predictable. From *love* Louis Zukofsky and Robert Duncan left two utterly different monuments as "last" poems. Set Zukofsky's paradise vision and the desire to record only the good in history and the invocation "Heart us invisibly" next to Duncan's "No faculty not ill at ease / lets us / begin where I must"—"the totality of perfect rest" next to "an eternal arrest."

What is the presence of the choric in Zukofsky, beyond quotation, however condensed? (Which is to say, in one regard of it at least, how does Zukofsky relate to not only Pound and Williams but Whitman—and the hiding in both Zukofsky and Whitman?) Don Byrd in the Zukofsky *Paideuma* (one of the best essays so far on Zukofsky): "extended intersubjective lyrics, the various voices involved all reaching beyond the lyric moment in an effort to establish a community." So then the nature of that community? Byrd goes on: "it is a music controlled not by mythos as in Stravinsky, or by logos, as in Schoenberg, but by the actual temporal, melodic, *and* semantic content of the language itself." (Note Guy Davenport in the Zukofsky *Maps* on Zukofsky's preference for *chords of words, tone clusters*—so the harmonic as share.) Zukofsky himself, talking with L. S. Dembo in the Spring 1969 *Contemporary Literature:* "there is a use of words where one word in context defines the other and it enriches so that what is put over is somebody's reaction to existence." Yet then there is David Melnick, writing specifically on *Bottom* in that same *Maps*, having already affirmed Zukofsky as "a resource of our whole endeavor in poetry": "Zukofsky's world has no room for people in it: he will not deal with more than one pair of eyes at a time." And so the nature of the self and the ground of the self and identity in the work and how that might be looked at? Robert Duncan in the Zukofsky *Paideuma* (he has just been speaking of Zukofsky's *neo-Aristotelianism*—again compare Joyce): "A kind of self consciousness in

which not the poet but the act of writing itself was this 'self'—an active conscience in making—enters in that is an extension of the counter-check of the line-by-line construction of idea and feeling in movement." And David Melnick again: "Disguises allow the desperate to escape, or to return as spies (phantom kings). But, inevitably, in comedy as in tragedy every eye is met by another and must voluntarily *give up* some part of its mastery or be denied it altogether. The world cannot be seized, cannot be rectified, by the invisible, characterless 'I.'" And the spiritual in Zukofsky, and the orphic—is there an orphic there? And Zukofsky and Celan, especially the prosody of "reading stations in the late word" in each?

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Inevitably, as Leggott stresses over and over, we come back to what is in fact the first experience of the poetry and what Zukofsky clearly particularly focussed on: the *sound*, its unpredictable diversity and novelty, the extraordinary vocabulary, the open flux of syntax, and the pleasure, the delight to be had from all of that (and the great humor in it). Even without other study that is primary and will have its impact ("Its art was beyond me yet somehow available in my sounding the poem," Duncan said). But no matter if we determine we are going to read *only* for the sound and juxtapositions and not pay any attention to what is "said" or "meant," the poems won't let us (nor do they satisfy equally throughout on that score), but keep drawing us (and resisting us) into their undertow, and into all the complexity of Zukofsky's world. As Levi Strauss says, words do *not* become non-referential.

Ultimately then we are also returned to what the poems themselves began with. Levi again: "There is one more thing one can do—one can look at flowers. . . .against the erring brain." Yes, said another friend, but a good botanical guide would do that too. But not with all the overtones and layerings of *80 Flowers?* In fact we can think of *80 Flowers* as Zukofsky's botanical guide, as a *garden diary*, which one of his major sources, Taylor's gardening encyclopedia, recommends each gardener keep: "a few carefully thought-out notes are invaluable" (and best in loose leaf form, as Zukofsky kept most of his), and should include one's *feelings* about the plants: "These records will serve not only as a history of your garden but as a history of you the gardener." "Formally, *80 Flowers* is the tour de force of Zukofsky's late style of condensed lyricism in which words freed from conventional syntax invite or demand that an audience make what aural or semantic connections it can." "The garden must be like a real garden, with cycles of growth; blossomings and witherings. Recurrence." "The beauty of it is in the listening and the looking, and in the power these activities have of exciting or inciting attention—to universes, their stars, their flowers." (Leggott, 357, 356, 355.)

For all of their vast differences, I return to Zukofsky as I return to Mallarmé, for the refreshment of the mind each time, the other "gears" it is put into, for the challenge and the charm, for the integrity of language in every nuance of use, demanding, sharpening, revealing, perplexing, keeping unresolved, keeping responsible. And wanting other and more. Valéry's 1931 tribute, "I Would Sometimes Say to Mallarmé. . .," is indeed worth looking at with Zukofsky, for how it fits him and just as importantly for how it does not. It offers this (the translation is by Malcolm Cowley, in *Leonardo, Poe, Mallarmé*, volume 8 of the Bollingen/Princeton Valéry):

> So anyone who did not put aside Mallarmé's involved texts found himself engaged by slow degrees in the task of relearning how to read. If he tried to give them a meaning that was not unworthy of their admirable form or of the labor those elaborate figures of speech had assuredly demanded of the author, he inevitably came to associate the delights of poetry with a sustained effort of the mind and of its powers of combination. The result was that Syntax, a form of calculation, resumed its rank among the Muses.

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To conclude, let these speak:

> we forgot that we were not performing the chief moral obligation of humanity, which is to protect the works of love.
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> • • •
>
> Mystery, to use that admirable English word meaning all information relating to the theory and practice of a craft, which we borrowed from the Old French *mestier*, and by carelessness amounting to genius confused in spelling with the word we derive from the Greek for occult.
>
> —Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*

> treasures of potentially useful variability deserve careful study.
>
> —Edgar Anderson, *Plants Man and Life*

> the study of the scope of poetry *is* poetry, and requires all the reasons of poetry for its pursuit.
>
> —Laura Riding, Preface to her 1938 *Collected Poems*

—KENNETH IRBY

CONTRIBUTORS NOTES

CLARK COOLIDGE's latest book is *The Rova Improvisations* from Sun & Moon Press. LARRY FAGIN is the author of *Rhymes of a Jerk, I'll Be Seeing You, Stabs*, and *Nuclear Neighborhoods*. The Coolidge/Fagin *Unaugural Poem* was first published by The Figures Press in 1993. DAVID HINTON has translated BEI DAO's new book of poems, *Forms of Distance*, due out from New Directions this summer. Hinton's most recent book is *The Selected Poems of T'ao Ch'ien* (Copper Canyon). Bei Dao, a Chinese poet in exile since 1989, now lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan; he was the McAndless Professor at Eastern Michigan University in 1993. CHANTAL CHEN-ANDRO is an Assistant Professor at Paris 7 University and a translator of contemporary Chinese poetry and fiction. The Bei Dao Interview and Statement on *Today* magazine first appeared, in French, in *Poesie* magazine, edited by Michel Deguy in Paris. In 1987 PETER REDGROVE published his widely-praised manifesto on the Gaia hypothesis *The Black Goddess and the Sixth Sense*, and is currently engaged in writing a study of Mesmerism, sexuality and poetry: *The Mesmer Body*. JOHN OLSON will soon have poems in *Another Chicago Magazine* and *New American Writing;* he lives in Seattle. LISA ISAACSON is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Denver. MARY CAPONEGRO is the author of *The Star Cafe*, a collection of short stories, and is at work on another collection of fiction with an Italian flavor. GEORGE ECONOMOU began work on this series of prose poems at the Bellagio Study and Conference Center in Italy, where he also completed his translation of Langland's *Piers Plowman*, The C-Text. GAEL TURNBULL's most recent book is a new and selected poems published in Canada, *While Breath Persist*. GEORGE ANGEL is a writer living in the United States. NATHANIEL MACKEY's recent publications include *School of Udra* (City Lights, 1993), *Djbot Baghostus's Run* (Sun & Moon, 1993) and *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 1993). FERNANDO CASTRO is a Peruvian philosopher and critic of photography; he is a regular contributor to *Art-Nexus* (Colombia), *Spot* (Houston) and *Photometro* (San Francisco) art and photography magazines. JAMES WANLESS lives on Grosse Ile, Michigan, and has been working on his translations of Henri

Michaux's prose since the 1970s. Sun & Moon has recently published CHARLES BERNSTEIN's *Dark City*, and reissued *Content's Dream: Essays 1975–1984*. KEITH TUNA is currently completing a manuscript on British poetry and coediting a book of essays on Mina Loy. ANDREW SCHELLING's most recent book is *The India Book: Essays and Translations from Indian Asia* (O Books); a collection of poetry, *Old Growth*, is forthcoming from Broken Moon. HORACIO COSTA is a Brazilian poet living in Mexico City; CHARLES PERRONE, who has translated Costa's *The Book of Fracta*, is an Associate Professor of Portuguese & Brazilian Literature at the University of Florida. CECILIA VICUNA is a Chilean poet living in NYC; her most recent book is reviewed in this issue of *Sulfur* by Rachel Blau DuPlessis. JASON WEISS is the author of *Writing at Risk: Interviews in Paris with Uncommon Writers* (University of Iowa Press, 1991). RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS is working on another book of *Drafts* and has a poem forthcoming in *Parataxis* 17 (England). NORMA COLE's fourth book of poetry, *Mars*, is just out from Listening Chamber Press, Berkeley. ROGER RIGGINS has published poetry in *Hambone* and is a contributing editor to *Home Planet News*. TODD MARSHALL teaches English at the University of Kansas. SHERMAN PAUL is Carver Professor of American Literature, Emeritus, at the University of Iowa; his most recent book is *For Love of the World: Essays on Nature Writers*. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN's *Under World Arrest* will be published by Black Sparrow Press this spring. BARBARA GUEST's most recent collection of poems is *Defensive Rapture* (Sun & Moon), whose title poem first appeared in *Sulfur*. RAE ARMANTROUT's new collection of poetry, *Made To Seem*, will be published by Sun & Moon this year. KENNETH IRBY's most recent book is *Call Steps* (Station Hill/Tansy).

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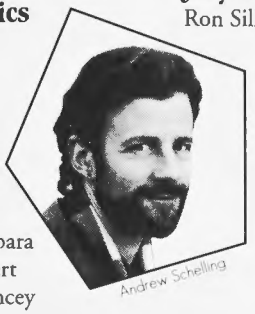
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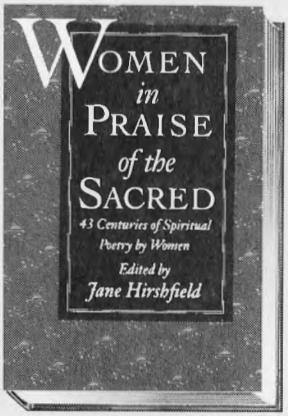

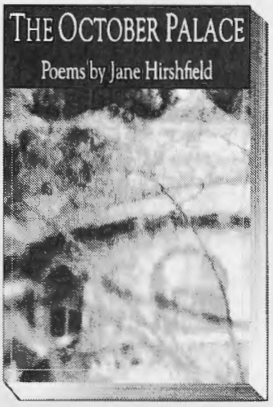

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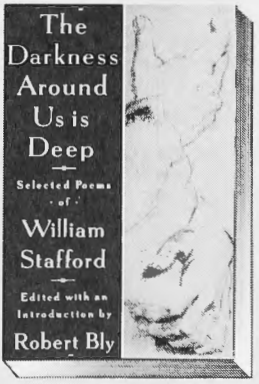

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